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THE CHINESE IN PENINSULAR MALAYSIA: A  
STUDY OF RACE RELATIONS IN A PLURAL SOCIETY

BY  
TING CHEW PEH

A Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Sociology  
University of Warwick  
COVENTRY

June, 1976

## SYNOPSIS

The present study is concerned with the problems of race relations in Peninsular Malaysia, with special reference to the Chinese community. My main thesis is that Chinese institutions and organizations, together with their values, economic and political activities tend to make interaction and integration difficult in the conflict-prone Malaysian plural society. However, despite the tremendous amount of dissensus and conflict, the society has managed to survive through the fact that the various component segments are bound together not only by political institutions, but also by their being involved in the same economic institutions.

The study begins with an Introduction, which examines the main structural features of the Malayan society during the colonial period to serve as a background for discussion.

Chapter 1 deals with the overall stratification and structure of the Chinese community. Particular attention is paid to Chinese guilds and associations which tend to perpetuate social distinctions between Chinese and Malays.

Chapter 2 attempts to examine Chinese role in Malaysian economy. It tries to show the relative position of the

Chinese in Malaysian economy and concludes that the Chinese are far from controlling Malaysian economy as has been alleged.

Chapters 3 and 4 trace Chinese politics in pre-war and post-war Malaysia. Three main currents of influence on the Chinese during the pre-war period - Chinese secret societies, The Kuomintang and the Malayan Communist Party - are examined. For the post-war period, an attempt is made to examine Chinese participation in party politics as well as their relatively subordinate position in the Alliance Party.

Chapter 5 examines Chinese education in Malaysia. Attention is focused on the various governmental efforts to devise a national education policy and its implications for Chinese education. The political significance of the education issue is also examined.

Chapter 6 endeavours to analyse race relations in Malaysia, focusing on the sources of conflict between Chinese and Malays. A brief account of the 1969 racial riots is also provided.

Chapter 7 deals with the problems of national unity. It is argued that the Malaysian plural society is held together by political as well as economic institutions. Some deliberate attempts to foster unity are also examined.

Chapter 8 attempts to examine some theoretical framework. It focuses on two major problems, namely the inadequacy of some Western theoretical models and the theory of the plural society and its relevance in Malaysia.



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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to my supervisor Professor John Rex for his constant encouragement, suggestions and useful criticisms without which this thesis would not have been completed in time.

My thanks also go to many of my teachers, colleagues and friends who have in one way or another helped or encouraged me in the production of the thesis.

I am also grateful to the National University of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur for financial support during my stay in Britain, and to the University of Warwick library for providing me with the inter-library loan facilities. I would also like to thank the Asia Foundation and its representative in Kuala Lumpur, Mr. Laurence T. Forman, for offering me a travel grant that enabled me to return to Warwick for the completion of my thesis.

Last but by no means least, I wish particularly to express my gratitude to my wife for her wonderful patience and unfailing encouragement.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AMCJA	All Malaya Council of Joint Action.
API	Angkatan Pemuda Insaf (Awakened Youth Movement).
DAP	Democratic Action Party.
FMCE	Federal of Malaya Certificate of Education.
FMS	Federated Malay States.
GERAKAN	Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (People's Movement Party).
HSC	Higher School Certificate of Education.
IMP	Independence of Malaya Party.
KMT	Kuomintang.
LCE	Lower School Certificate Examination.
MCP	Malayan Communist Party.
MDU	Malayan Democratic Union.
MIC	Malayan Indian Congress.
MNP	Malay Nationalist Party.
MPABA	Malayan People's Anti-British Army.
MPAJA	Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army.
MRLA	Malayan Races Liberation Army.
NLAF	National Language Action Front.
NOC	National Operations Council.
PAP	People's Action Party.
PEKEMAS	Parti Keadilan Masyarakat (Social Justice Party).
PMIP	Pan Malayan Islamic Party.
PPP	People's Progressive Party.

PUTERA	Pusat Tenaga Rakyat (Centre for People's Force).
SF	Socialist Front.
SNAP	Sarawak National Party.
SUPP	Sarawak United People's Party.
UCSCA	United Chinese School Committees Association.
UCSTA	United Chinese School Teachers Association.
UDP	United Democratic Party.
UMNO	United Malays National Organization.
UMS	Unfederated Malay States.

## INTRODUCTION

### THE STRUCTURE OF THE MALAYAN SOCIETY

#### DURING THE COLONIAL ERA

The plural society in Malaysia\* is largely the legacy of British colonialism. In order to understand the structure of this society in general, it is necessary to look at two very important components of colonialism, namely, the political domination by the colonizing power and its economic exploitation and control.

#### Political Domination

To begin with, we should look briefly at the indigenous political system of Malaya. Traditionally, the largest political unit of the Malays was the State (Negri) headed by a Sultan drawn from a royal patrilineage. The states were organized around river valleys and river mouths as rivers afforded the main lines of communication and trade. Under each state there were a number of districts (daerah) under the control of local chiefs, who were either drawn from the aristocratic lineages or had connections with the royal lineage. Together these district chiefly families formed a ruling class of the whole state.

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\* Malaysia consists of Peninsular Malaysia (the eleven states of the Malay Peninsula, known as Malaya before 1963 and West Malaysia between 1963 - 1974) and the Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak. For the purpose of this study, Malaysia, West Malaysia and Malaya are used interchangeably to refer to Peninsular Malaysia only.



The districts were organized into smaller political units known as the kampung (village) headed by a penghulu (headman) who functioned as the bridge and channel of communication between his villagers and the district chief. The village was a unit of common residence, and to a lesser extent of kinship and economic cooperation.

The whole social structure was marked by two classes - the ruling class and the subject class. The distinction between the two classes was based on birth and was clearly marked by custom and belief. Intermarriage was disapproved and social mobility rare. The ruling class had absolute authority over the subjects. The chief had the privilege of exacting corvee (kerah) as well as of taking a substantial share from the economic surplus accumulated by his subjects who were largely subsistence agriculturalists, mainly rice growers and fishermen.

Among the ruling classes in different states there was little contact. Intermarriage across state frontiers was also rare. The rulers, however, recognized each other's status as equal to their own.<sup>1</sup>

Over this traditional Malay political system was laid the British colonial bureaucracy at the end of the nineteenth century. Before the British began to extend its power into the Malay states, their influence had already been established on the islands of Penang and Singapore and in the state of Malacca.

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1. The above section on the indigenous political system of Malaya draws largely on the work of J.M. Gullick (1958).

It began in 1786, when Francis Light hoisted the British flag in Penang, an island off the west coast of the Malay Peninsula. Thirty-three years later, in 1819, Singapore was acquired by Stamford Raffles. Malacca came into the possession of Britain in 1824. These three settlements formed the Straits Settlements in 1826, and were placed under the control of the Indian Government until 1867 when they were transferred to the Colonial Office to become a Crown Colony of Great Britain.

The Treaty of Pangkor of 1874 between the British and the state of Perak marked the beginning of British intervention in the Malay states. The treaty stipulated that the Sultan was to accept a British Resident 'whose advice must be asked and acted on all questions other than those touching Malay religion and custom'. This system, later came to be known as the Residential System, had extended to Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang by 1895 and in that year the four states were merged to form the Federated Malay States (FMS) under a British Resident-General. In 1914, Johore combined with the north-western and eastern states of Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan and Trengganu (these four states were ceded to British protection from Thai suzerainty) to form the Unfederated Malay States (UMS). Thus, by the second decade of the present century, the pattern of British rule was established. There were, altogether, three political groupings - the Straits Settlements, the FMS and the UMS. The Straits Settlements were ruled directly by the

British colonial office through the Governor. The FMS and UMS were governed through the Residential System which was in essence a form of indirect rule. These three groupings were to remain until the Japanese Occupation in 1942. The war brought great changes in Malaya. After the war, in 1948, the FMS, UMS and the Straits Settlements, with the exception of Singapore (which constituted a separate Crown Colony), combined to form the Federation of Malaya which later achieved its independence in 1957.

The political institution created in Malaya by Great Britain was therefore a combination of direct and indirect rule. Both under the Residential System and under the Federation of Malaya scheme, the indigenous sultanate in the Malay states was kept intact and the native rulers and local chieftains were absorbed into the administrative machinery. It was indirect rule in name, but in actual fact real political power was at all times exercised by the British who occupied the higher echelons of the administration, and the native rulers, with little effective control, merely functioned as political puppets of the administration (Emerson, 1964:123).

There was, in colonial Malaya - this was particularly true in the prewar period - almost a complete absence of representative elective institutions. There was no franchise. The Federal Council of the FMS was dominated by an official majority composed exclusively of British officers. So was the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements.

Furthermore, all but a few of the unofficial members of both the Federal and Legislative Councils were appointed by the Governor who was also the High Commissioner of the Malay states (Emerson, 1964: 180 & 277). Under the Federation Scheme of 1948, the situation did not change very much. Although a Federal Legislative Council was established, its membership was nominated rather than popularly elected, and its function was of the nature of advisory since the High Commissioner alone could veto a bill and had the power to give effect to any bill which the Legislative Council failed to pass (Mills, 1958:39).

From the beginning, British policy was biased in favour of the Malays. While other immigrant communities were excluded from positions of administrative or political authority, the Malay traditional elite, the aristocracy, was given opportunities to participate in the government. In order to create a Malay administrative elite to aid the colonial regime, the latter established in 1905 the Kuala Kangsar Malay College to provide special educational facilities for the sons of Malay rulers and chiefs (Roff, 1967:101). The graduates of the college were absorbed into the Malay Administrative Service, a junior branch of the Malayan Civil Service which was largely staffed by Europeans.

One important reason for the exclusion of Chinese and Indians from political and administrative authority by the

colonial regime was probably the British recognition of their obligation to look after the special interests of the Malay ruling class. Secondly, the non-Malay communities<sup>2</sup> in pre-war Malaya were manifestly transient and were persistently regarded by the British as being so even though by 1931 there were tendencies toward permanent settlement. The British also held the popular stereotypes that the Chinese and to a lesser extent Indians were "unassimilable", uninterested in government affairs, and whose main concern was making money. No efforts were thus made to integrate them politically with the Malay community. Finally, the British increasingly saw their role as the arbitrator and adjudicator among the various communities in the plural society. This they could only achieve by maintaining the distinctions and divisions between the various communities (Roff, 1967:110-111).

The political structure developed in Malaya as a result of British indirect rule was typical of other colonial situations. The essence was one of paternalism. Effective political authority was rested with the British. The native Malay rulers and aristocratic class were given opportunities to participate in the administration and government of the country, but they occupied mainly subordinate positions with little effective control. The immigrant communities - the Chinese and Indians - were largely excluded

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2. The term "communities" was the common British colonial usage to refer to ethnic groups. In order to follow local practice, the terms communities, ethnic groups and racial groups are interchangeable in this thesis.

from effective participation in the government and the civil service. With independence and the withdrawal of colonial power, the political authority formerly held by the British was transferred to the Malays who regarded themselves as they still do as the 'sons of the soil'. This situation of Malay predominance in the political field, vis-a-vis other Asian communities, as we shall see later, still persists today.

### Economic Domination

Equally significant as political domination was the economic exploitation of the British. The two primary forms of British colonial economic exploitation in Malaya were the establishments of tin mines and plantation agriculture (rubber). The expansion of mining and rubber industries created a great demand for labour. Because of their tradition-bound subsistence economy, the Malays could not be attracted to these newly created economies. The answer had to be found elsewhere. China and India readily provided unlimited supplies of mobile labour who as people from economically or commercially more advanced areas, were more familiar to money economy than the native Malays. Moreover, the cost of importing and employing Asian labour was lower than that of using European expatriates (Hunter, 1966:61). The result was the importation of large numbers of Chinese and Indian immigrants into the tin and rubber zones of the west coast of Malaya.

This large-scale Chinese and Indian immigration stimulated by British colonialism has had far reaching results. It was largely responsible for the creation of a

plural society in Malaya, and with it the danger of racial conflict.<sup>3</sup>

Chinese and Indian immigrants were brought to Malaya through different recruiting systems. In the case of Chinese immigrants, broadly speaking, there were two categories based on the degree of freedom they possessed. The first category included those who had sufficient means to make their voyage from their homeland to Malaya. These immigrants had no obligations whatever to anyone on arrival in Malaya, and could move freely and look for whatever employment they were competent. However, the demand for labour in tin mines and rubber estates was so great that these free immigrants were insufficient to meet the need. Under such circumstances, a category of relatively 'un-free' immigrants emerged through the much-abused credit-ticket system and later through the system of private recruitment. Both of these systems were a form of indenture whereby the coolies had to work for their employers for a period of time until the cost of their passage together with other expenses had been paid off.<sup>4</sup>

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3. Although it could be argued that racial problems are not a direct product of British colonisation in Malaya as in Africa on the ground that Chinese immigration preceded the arrival of Europeans, the colonial powers must bear responsibility for making the problems more serious and complex by the influx of immigrants whom they encouraged. See Hunter (1966:60).
  4. For a treatment of Chinese labour in Malaya, see W.L. Blythe (1947:64-114).

The immigration of Indians was largely stimulated by the development of rubber industry. They were recruited under the indenture system and after its abolition in 1910, through the Kangany system. Under the system, a kangany (who was himself an immigrant working on the estate as a foreman or simply as an elderly labourer of some social standing or influence) was sent by the employer to return to his village in India to recruit labourers for which he usually obtained a commission. Parmer has described the system in a succinct manner:

The Kangany system was more than a means of recruitment. It was also a method of employment on the estates, and the Indian critics disliked the varying degrees of control which the kangany exercised over the labourers whom he recruited. Control was exercised in various ways and was often a compound of family ties, personality, friendship and admiration for the kangany's worldly wisdom. The kangany sometimes displayed genuine leadership. He would listen to labourers' grievances, arbitrate their disputes and intercede on the labourers' behalf with the estate staff and the manager. Some employers hired Indian labourers by kangany gangs so that membership in a gang tended to be a form of job insurance. But the chief element of control in very many cases appears to have been the indebtedness of the labourer to the kangany, who was often a money-lender - an easy source of small loans. The kangany's hold over the labourers was supported by many managers who looked to the kangany to help reinforce estate discipline and administer the labour force. For such services the kangany was paid 'head money', usually two cents daily for every labourer who appeared for work (Parmer, 1960:68-69).



Despite their difference in forms, both the Chinese system of recruitment and the kangany system had much the same effect, in that the labourer was either indentured or obliged to repay to his employer the expenses incurred in his transportation to Malaya. This means that the majority of them were already in debt on arrival in Malaya. They had no choice but to work for their creditors. In terms of indebtedness, the situation of these Chinese and Indian coolies was similar to that of the Indians in the Spanish colonies under the system of debt-peonage system. The difference was that under the debt-peonage system the labourer became indebted not through expenses incurred in his transportation as was the case of the Chinese or Indian labourer, but through being granted a piece of land or an advance of wages (Rex, 1970a:40).

Chinese and Indian labour in Malaya was organized on different lines. Chinese labour, whether on tin mines or on estates, was rarely employed directly by the employer but rather by a multiplicity of contractors and sub-contractors. In the case of tin mine labourers, they were often housed in a kongsi (lodging house) and provided with food and occasionally small loans. Through what came to be known as the Truck System, the labourers were paid in goods instead of money or in money on the understanding that they would buy provisions from their employers. The labourers were often exploited by being charged high prices

for provisions or goods. This would make them remain heavily in debt and consequently work in the mines for years (Blythe, 1947:104-6). In the case of Chinese estate labourers, they usually lived in nearby villages and rarely lived on the estates where they worked. This situation was in sharp contrast with Indian labourers, the majority of whom being employed and paid directly by the estate employers. And in almost all cases they lived on the estates.

The Malays were hardly involved in tin mining and those who were engaged in rubber estates were generally employed on a casual basis. Like the Chinese, they lived in their respective Malay villages.

Thus different methods were employed in the organization of labour force, based primarily on racial criteria. Instead of having a unitary labour force consisting of different racial groups, there emerged in the estates three different types of labour force: the Indian, Chinese and Malay labour force. Each was dealt with separately, paid differently and provided with different working and living conditions (Silcock, 1965:186-7). This tended to encourage residential segregation and separation of the different communities.

Through the influx of Chinese and Indian labour, the British colonial regime was able to create in Malaya an export-oriented economy based on the production of rubber and tin. Because of their technological and organizational advantage provided by the British administration in obtaining land for tin mining (Ness, 1967:32-33), the Europeans dominated many important sectors of the economy, notably in

large-scale mining, rubber industries and import and export trade. The immigrant communities, particularly the Chinese, controlled a preponderant part of the medium-scale units of production and business organisations, and because of their involvement in the ancillary occupations of the export-oriented economy, were able to gain a foothold on the commercial ladder as small-scale traders and middlemen. The majority of the Indians were employed on the rubber plantations. The Malay community was largely undisturbed by the economic development. British policy towards them was one of paternalism and protectionism. The Malay traditional elite, as mentioned earlier, was as far as possible absorbed into the administration while the Malay peasants were largely kept on their land with a subsistence economy through the Malay Land Reservation Laws which effectively assured Malay ownership of land.

The occupational specialization of the different ethnic groups was best reflected by the 1947 census report (del Tufo, 1949). Nearly three-quarters of the total Malay male working population was engaged in agriculture (mainly rice cultivation and rubber cultivation) and fishing. Of the Chinese male working population, more than one-half was engaged in mining, manufacture, transport and commerce. Only one-third of it was involved in agriculture, mainly rubber cultivation. Over 40% of Indians were engaged in agriculture (mainly estate labourers) while a substantial proportion of them was employed in public administration, public transportation (especially in the railways) and commerce (del Tufo, 1949:106).

To the extent that the Malay peasants still clung to their land and traditional subsistence economy and remained outside the new and emergent market-oriented economy, they could be regarded as a kind of 'external proletariat' (Rex, 1970a: 35 & 52).

A form of dualist economy thus developed out of the colonial situation. This is meant not in the sense as Boeke (1953) uses the term, meaning the co-existence of a capitalist and a pre-capitalist economy. Rather, the term implies the co-existence of two different orientations and foci of activity within the same economy (Ness, 1967:28-30). On the one hand there was the modern colonial sector concentrating on trade, tin and rubber production. Largely controlled by the British and other European firms, with the Chinese and Indians playing a subsidiary role, this modern sector was concentrated on the west coast and the Straits Settlements. On the other hand there was the traditional or the peasant sector. This sector was dominated by the Malays and concentrated in the relatively less developed states of the east coast and the north. Their main activities were rice cultivation, fishing and small-holder rubber planting.

In such a colonial society based on a dualist economy, where the social order consisted of Europeans, natives and Asian immigrants, social and economic stratification often involved racial criterion resulting in the European occupying the top of the social and economic hierarchy, the natives at

the bottom and the immigrants in the middle (Kennedy, 1945:310). In so far as the position of the Europeans and the Malays was concerned, colonial Malaya fitted neatly into this picture. This stratification scheme, however, did not apply entirely to the Chinese and the Indians. Undoubtedly, there were Chinese and Indian middle-classes. But there were also large numbers of Chinese labourers and Indian estate workers whose social and economic position was no better than the Malay peasants and who had little chance to rise in the economic scale (Djojohadikusumo, 1968:14).

The resultant social hierarchy with the white man at the top was not without significance. The presence of the colonial power with its firm authority had the effect of quietening the anxieties and the aggressiveness of the conflicting groups and of preventing racial feelings from running high. As Hunter (1966:66) has aptly put it:

The very existence of such an upper class, towards which so many faces were turned for favour or protection or, indeed, in admiration, overlaid in some degree the violence of feeling between different subordinate groups; they saw each other not quite full-face but in relation to a third.

The central institutions of western enterprises in Malaya were the merchant and managing-agency firms, commonly known as the agency houses. They were distinguished by a variety of functions and a wide range of interest. Although they differed from one another in their actual scope, many of these agency houses specialized in imports and exports, as selling and purchasing agents for foreign

manufacturers; as managing agents for rubber estates and as agents for shipping lines and insurance companies (Allen & Donnithorne, 1954:52-53).

The agency houses had a particularly dominant position in the country's economic mainstay - the rubber industry. They controlled as many as 75% of the total rubber plantations, through either their large share interest or their executive authority over the affairs of the companies. Their dominant position was further strengthened by an interlocking of directorships of the various rubber companies they managed.<sup>5</sup> It is not an exaggeration, therefore, to say that the agency houses were 'a key factor in the organization of the rubber industry'. As Kathleen Stahl (1951:117) has noted, the status of these agency houses

derived from the fact that they were large and old established merchant houses, that they were the pioneers of rubber planting and floated and subsequently managed, both in London and through their local branches in Malaya, a large number of companies representing a considerable section of the industry, and that the heads of these agency houses took a leading part in shaping the policy of the industry through the Rubber Growers' Association.

In tin mining industry, however, the agency houses were less important. With the exception of a few, there was very little overlapping investment between the tin and rubber industry (Puthuchear, 1960:54). Still, British capital has dominated the industry since the introduction of

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5. For an example of the interlocking pattern of directorships see Puthuchear (1960:88).

dredges in the first two decades of the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> Like the agency houses in rubber industry, many European mining companies were linked by interlocking directorships. More importantly, tin smelting - an important activity in the tin industry - was monopolised by two British companies, the Straits Trading Company and the Consolidated Tin Smelters. These smelting companies exercised a measure of control over the Chinese miners who depended on them for tin processing and in some cases for credit (Puthucheary, 1960:95).

Considering the fact that about three-quarters of rubber estates were controlled by the agency houses, there is little doubt that they had a commanding position in the rubber industry. Commerce was the next important activity of the agency houses. It was estimated that the agency houses together with other European-owned firms controlled about two-thirds of the import and export trade in the 1950's (Puthucheary, 1960: Chapter 3).

All this points to the fact that Malaya's economy was largely controlled by the Europeans, mainly British. The new economy created by the colonial regime was decisively commercial and export-oriented. The agricultural and

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6. In 1938, about 70% of the total issued capital of registered mining companies represented British capital investment. In 1941, the number of British tin mining companies operating in Malaya was over seventy. See Stahl (1951:113-4)

mineral products were exported to Britain and other western markets for industrial use. Little industrial development was encouraged in the country. There was, for example, very limited development in the manufacturing sector based upon factory production, a situation typical of colonial societies. In terms of direction and ownership of the tin and rubber industries, or in the import and export trade, the share of the natives was insignificant.

While western enterprise was instrumental in developing the economy of Malaya, the economic structure and development of Malaya cannot be described solely in terms of western enterprise without making reference to the Asian communities. Indian labour had a significant contribution to the plantation industry. The rubber small-holdings which constituted nearly half the total rubber acreage, were almost exclusively owned by the Asian communities (The 1953 Rubber Statistics Handbook shows that of a total of 1,369,000 acres under small-holdings, 47.3% were owned by the Malays, 40.1% by Chinese and 8.7% by Indians). Tin mining was pioneered by the Chinese. Small-scale trading and retailing was also largely in the hands of the Chinese, with Indians constituting a small proportion. In addition, almost all the intermediary role between the producer and the exporter, and between the consumer and the importer, was performed by the Chinese (Puthucheary, 1960:64). In this respect they constituted an important link in the European dominated import-export chain. Perhaps it was for the above trader-cum-middleman capacity that the Chinese were sometimes given the cognomen of the "Jews of the East".



Thus far we have touched on the central theme of colonialism - political and economic domination. We can now proceed to look at the overall structure of the plural society.

### The Growth of a Plural Society

As mentioned earlier, British policy of encouraging the large-scale immigration of the Chinese and Indians to meet the great labour demand resulted in the growth of a plural society in Malaya. Indeed, by 1911 a plural society had come into being. In that year of the total population of 2,339,000 the Malays constituted 58.6%, the Chinese 29.6% and the Indians 10.2%. Thereafter the percentage of Malays fell and that of the non-Malays rose as a result of more immigration, so that by 1947, the Malays accounted for only 49.5% of a total of 4,908,000, as against 38.4% Chinese and 10.8% Indians. Table I.1 shows the racial composition of Malaya, 1911 to 1970. This table, however, fails to show the country's actual demographic structure because it ignores completely the diversity of racial composition existing between different regions. Two points can be said about the residential segregation of the various ethnic groups. First, as can be seen in Table I.2 the east coast and the north-west 'rice-bowl' regions were and still are predominantly Malay while the non-Malays were

concentrated on the west coast tin and rubber states of Penang, Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan, Johore and Malacca. Second, the non-Malays, in particular the Chinese, were concentrated in urban areas while the Malays were mainly rural. Table I.3 shows the racial composition of urban population, 1931-1957.

The urban-rural patterns by ethnic groups are more evident if we look at the proportion of urban to total population by each group. The Chinese proportion of the population living in towns in 1947 was 31.1% as against 7.3% Malays and 25.8% Indians. The corresponding figures for 1957 were 44.7%, 11.3% and 30.6% and for 1970, 47.0%, 14.8% and 34.4% respectively.<sup>7</sup>

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7. 1970 Population and Housing Census of Malaysia, Community Groups, p.33, Table XVI.

Table I.1: Population of Malaya - by race and percentages, 1911-1970

Year	Total Pop. '000	Malays	Chinese	Indians	Others
1911	2,339	58.6	29.6	10.2	1.6
1921	2,907	54.0	29.4	15.1	1.5
1931	3,788	49.2	33.9	15.1	1.8
1947	4,908	49.5	38.4	10.8	1.3
1957	6,279	49.8	37.2	11.3	1.8
1963	7,707	50.0	36.9	11.1	1.9
1970	8,810	53.2	35.4	10.6	0.8

Sources: 1957 Population census of the Federation of Malaya,  
Report No. 14, p.3;

1970 Population and housing census of Malaysia,  
community groups, p.27

Monthly Statistical bulletin of West Malaysia, August 1972.

Table I.2: Racial composition of each state, by percentages, 1931-1970

State	Malays				Chinese				Indians			
	1931	1947*	1957	1970	1931	1947	1957	1970	1931	1947	1957	1970
Federation of Malaya	49.2	49.5	49.8	53.2	33.9	38.4	37.2	35.4	15.1	10.8	11.3	10.6
Penang	32.7	30.5	28.8	30.7	49.8	55.4	57.2	56.1	15.6	12.8	12.2	11.5
Selangor	23.1	26.4	28.8	34.6	45.3	51.0	48.2	46.3	29.2	20.4	20.1	18.3
Perak	35.7	37.8	39.7	43.1	42.3	46.6	44.2	42.5	20.7	14.7	14.9	14.2
Johore	46.4	43.8	48.0	53.4	41.4	48.1	42.4	39.4	10.1	7.5	7.7	6.7
N. Sembilan	37.3	41.3	41.5	45.4	39.5	42.7	41.2	38.1	21.4	14.2	15.1	16.1
Malacca	51.0	50.3	49.1	51.8	34.9	40.2	41.5	39.6	12.4	8.2	8.1	7.8
Pahang	61.7	54.3	57.2	61.2	29.0	38.9	34.6	31.2	8.0	5.9	7.0	7.3
Kedah	66.6	68.0	67.7	70.7	18.2	20.9	20.5	19.3	12.0	9.3	9.7	8.4
Perlis	80.9	78.3	78.4	79.4	13.2	16.7	17.4	16.2	2.0	2.4	1.8	2.0
Kelantan	91.2	92.1	91.6	92.8	4.9	5.1	5.7	5.3	1.9	1.1	1.2	0.8
Trengganu	91.5	92.0	92.1	93.9	7.4	7.0	6.6	5.4	0.8	0.8	1.1	0.6.

\* The 1947 percentage include nomadic aborigines.

Sources: 1957 Population census of the federation of Malaya, Report No. 14, p.4;

1970 Population and Housing census of Malaysia, community groups, pp.32 & 45.

Table I.3: Racial composition of urban population, by percentages, 1931-57

<u>Urban areas of 1,000 pop. &amp; over</u>		Chinese	Malays	Indians
1931		59.6	19.2	17.8
1947		62.3	21.1	13.8
1957		63.5	22.6	10.7
Urban areas of 10,000 pop. & over		(not available)		
1931				
1947		63.1	19.0	14.7
1957		62.6	21.0	12.8

Source: 1957 Population Census, Report No. 14, p.10

This concentration of different ethnic groups in different regions seems to have important implications for race relations. To some extent this type of physical segregation quite effectively restricts contact between the various ethnic groups. In addition, communal jealousies are also generated by the fact that the west coast where non-Malay concentration is found is far more developed and enjoys a higher standard of living than the predominantly Malay east coast and the north.

Apart from political and economic domination by the British which we have earlier discussed, three other characteristics of colonialism present in colonial Malaya deserve a brief mention in our discussion of the plural society. First, there was the colour line which acted as a social barrier dividing the white population on the one hand from the native and immigrant population on the other. In common with other colonial situations, the colour line in Malaya was horizontal, the whites at the top while the yellow and the brown at the bottom. This colour line, as long as the whites held the reins of political power, would tilt but would never disappear - a situation not dissimilar to that described by Warner (1936:234-7) in the United States in connection with the relations between the white American and the Negro American. Warner's theory of colour-caste, however, as shall be shown later, fails to explain relations among the non-white populations, especially those between Malays and Chinese.

Secondly, there was the lack of social contact not only between the ruling white on the one hand and the colonial peoples on the other, but also between the natives and the immigrants. The ruling whites had their own exclusive recreational clubs, friendship circles, residential areas and other distinct social institutions. So had the natives, the Chinese and the Indian immigrants. Cultural and social separation between the various segments of the society was rather pronounced. Partly because of colour prejudice and partly because of differences of religion<sup>8</sup> and custom, intermarriage between the whites and the colonial peoples (and between the colonial peoples themselves) was rare. Consequently, the proportion of half-castes to the total population was insignificant in comparison with such mixed populations as the mullatos in Brazil, the Mestizos in Mexico or the Cape Coloureds in South Africa. Nevertheless, these half-castes, the Eurasians and the babas, though insignificant in terms of numbers, played some important role in Malaysian economy and politics.

Thirdly, colonial territories usually exhibited a low stage of development in the social services. In this respect, Malaya was luckier than many other colonial territories in that it received a far better deal. Public

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8. The Malays are exclusively Muslims. The Chinese are eclectic in their beliefs, practising a mixture of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. There is also a small proportion of Chinese Christians. The Indians are mainly Hindus, with a small minority of Muslims and Christians.

amenities, especially those related to the expansion of rubber and tin industries, were fairly well developed. But on education, very little was spent. This was probably aimed at keeping education for the natives down to a minimum. Popular education would undoubtedly produce an enlightened mass which would eventually threaten and undermine the whole structure of the colonial regime, that of political and economic superordination and subordination (Kennedy, 1945:311).

It is interesting to note at this juncture that, to a considerable extent, what Raymond Kennedy called the 'universal traits of colonialism' were all exhibited in colonial Malaya (Kennedy, 1945:306-346). These traits were the political domination of the coloniser, its economic exploitation, the presence of a colour line, the lack of social contact between the ruler and the ruled and finally a low stage of development in social services: all of which have been discussed in the preceding sections.

In order to ensure the separation of different ethnic groups, four major school systems were maintained or tolerated by the colonial regime. Malay education was strongly supported by the government, providing primary education mainly for the rural Malays. These Malay vernacular schools had strong religious overtones and did little to prepare Malay children for life in the modernizing society that was being created. Chinese education and schools were largely



left to their own devices. These schools used Mandarin as the medium of instruction and their curricula were strongly oriented toward mainland China, their main source of textbooks and teachers. Indian education was in the main provided on the estates by respective estate owners, providing primary education only. The main medium of instruction was Tamil, with some schools teaching Telugu or Punjabi. These schools, like the Chinese schools, were oriented toward their homeland - India. Finally, English education was provided by the government or the Christian missions. Although these schools provided a common curriculum to children of all ethnic groups, they were strongly oriented toward England, from where they obtained their textbooks.

Thus, in colonial Malaya, the institution of education functioned more to preserve the separate cultural identity of the various communities, rather than to create a united nation with a common identity. Education was essentially a divisive force, tending to support and reinforce the plural character of the society. No genuine effort was made by the colonial regime to build a unified national education system (Ness, 1967:42-45). Some observers have even argued that the plural educational system was a device to divide and rule (Tregonning, 1962:420-8).

The separation of the different communities was further reinforced by a factor arising out of political and military necessity - the Emergency. The Emergency was declared in 1948 to combat the communist insurrection and lasted for

twelve years. The communists were predominantly Chinese. Their supporters too, were primarily Chinese living on jungle fringes and rural areas. The government of the day realized that there was a relationship between the insurrection and material support and information supply afforded by the Chinese squatters. This realization and the desire to defeat the communists prompted the implementation by the government of the Briggs Plan of 1950, under which half a million or a quarter of the total Chinese population were resettled in nucleated 'New Villages' (Dobby, 1952 & Sandhu, 1973). Altogether more than 500 such 'new villages' were created. The Briggs Plan had far reaching effects on race relations. It institutionalized the separation of the various communities and hardened communal divisions. The Chinese were bitter at the forcible nature of their transplantation and the consequent interruption of their rural economic activities such as market-gardening, pig-rearing and rubber tapping (Purcell, 1954:78-79). The Malays, on their part, resented the government's effort to provide amenities to the Chinese 'new villages' such as electricity and water which they themselves lacked (Purcell, 1954:167).

From the foregoing we can discern several important component elements in colonial Malaya. The first important group was the colonial administrators and European capitalist

entrepreneurs. The second group was the natives - the Malays. Then there was the immigrant group, mainly the Chinese and Indians. As we have already noted, all these groups had different functions and the division of labour was mainly along racial lines. In sharp contrast with such colonial society as South Africa, tropical Malaya did not attract white settlers in significant numbers and its mixed population as a result of miscegenation was insignificant in numbers.

However, apart from the elements mentioned above, the role of the missionaries needs to be mentioned briefly. Christian missionaries played an important role in educating the colonial peoples through the establishment of mission schools. Among the various communities, the Chinese and Indians were more affected by such missionary activities than the Muslim Malays, since the government prohibited Christian missions from proselytising the Muslims. However, the outcome of a missionary-sponsored English education in each community was the same: just as missionisation divided the African population in many parts of South Africa into the 'school people' and the 'red people' (Mayer, 1971), so in Malaya it produced in each community a group of English-educated people as distinguished from the non-English educated, thus creating divisions within each community. This situation was particularly marked in the Chinese community

where the English-educated, the 'British colonial Chinese' as Wolfgang Franke (1968:120) has called them, had the tendency of looking down with contempt upon their Chinese-educated countrymen.

With the exception of a small number who were able to penetrate to the basic values of the western culture, the majority of these English-educated Chinese had been uprooted and deculturised and became culturally and spiritually adrift: on the one hand, their English education was superficial and, on the other hand they knew practically nothing about Chinese humanistic tradition. In this respect of deculturation there was some affinity between the position of these 'British colonial Chinese' and that of the Amerindian in Brazil (Freyre, 1964:141-3 and Rex, 1970a:79). In both cases the result was the creation of a group of people without any identity who were more easily available for exploitation.

This, then, was the situation in colonial Malaya. Through the conquest and subsequent indirect rule of the British, the natives and the immigrants alike were rendered politically ineffective, if not completely impotent. The policy of encouraging large numbers of immigrant coolies into Malaya not only made possible the economic exploitation of natural resources, particularly rubber and tin by western enterprise, but more importantly, it led to the

growth of a plural society in which each community lived separately. The nature of this society fitted well into Furnivall's (1948:304-5) description of the plural societies in Burma and Indonesia:

In Burma, as in Java, probably the first thing that strikes the visitor is the medley of peoples - European, Chinese, Indian and native. It is in the strictest sense a medley, for they mix but do not combine. Each group holds by its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways. As individuals they meet, but only in the market-place, in buying and selling. There is a plural society, with different sections of the community living side by side, but separately, within the same political unit. Even in the economic sphere there is a division of labour along racial lines. Natives, Chinese, Indians and Europeans all have different functions, and within each major group subsections have particular occupations.

It is hoped that the above discussion of the colonial social structure in Malaya is adequate to bring out some salient features about the basic structure of colonial Malaya. These were, first of all, the separation of the various communities with little social contact; secondly, the differing positions of the various communities in terms of political and economic power, with the British dominating both spheres; thirdly, separate educational systems which produced students with different outlook and orientations; and finally, the submergence of inter-communal conflict due largely to the presence of the colonial power as an arbitrator. All these were directly or indirectly the outcome of colonial policy.

This type of plural social structure was quite unique in several aspects. It did not consist of hierarchically arranged castes like the traditional Hindu society. There were no classes in conflict in the real Marxist sense. Neither was there a system of hierarchical roles and statuses based on a value consensus as the stratification theorists seem to imply. Rather, it consisted of segments which were divided vertically cutting across the strata. Each segment in the society had its own values, language, religion, and way of life. The society as a whole was more characterised by conflict and coercion than value consensus. Indeed, value consensus was and still is conspicuously lacking. Under such a social system, as we shall see later, the Parsonian account of stratification fails to work because it depends largely on the existence of a unitary value system. Neither would the Marxist notion of class struggle be very illuminating.

Rex (1970a:73-74) has suggested the term 'colonial estate system' to refer to such composite colonial societies. Whatever else might be the case in other colonial societies, colonial Malaya fits without much stress into this description for at least two reasons. In the first place, among the various constituent ethnic or racial groups - the European, the Malay, the Chinese and the Indian - there was a great degree of occupational specialization, with the function of each group being defined quite clearly. The occupational specialization was itself suggestive of a kind of estate or caste system.

Secondly, vertical social mobility was low, partly because of the presence of a colour line, partly because of the fact that ethnic groups were attached to a few traditional professions. One's social position was, to a certain degree, determined by one's birth (Wertheim, 1964:75).

Independence has brought various changes to Malaya. Politically, its colonial status was ended and replaced by an independent parliamentary democracy, even though militarily, the country is still to some extent dependent on British and other Commonwealth forces. Political independence also means that the once British-dominated polity is now largely in the hands of Malaysians, in particular the Malays, largely as a result of British pro-Malay policy.

The economy has also undergone several changes so as to attune itself to political changes. There has been a greater pace for industrialization as well as rural development. There is also an indication that the economy is more strongly oriented to the indigenous labourer and consumer. In some instances, the state has intervened on behalf of a particular ethnic group generally regarded as backward economically.

Despite these changes, however, the economy is still very much export-oriented. It is still largely dependent on the two primary products - rubber and tin. More importantly, in terms of ownership and control, as will be shown in chapter two, Malaysian economy is still largely in the hands of foreign companies.

In the case of the plural society, it is almost impossible to say with any precision to what extent the Malaysian society is becoming less pluralistic. The reasons are, first, there is a lack of data on Malaysian values that would enable one to make some assessment on the extent of national consciousness over certain issues; second, neither are there any studies of voting, opinions, or attitudes on which the assessment of consensus might be based (Ness, 1967:69). Some general observations, however, can be made. In the political sphere, there is increasing joint participation. The number of non-Malay electors has increased steadily over the years. In economy there has been an increased Malay participation especially in commerce and industries as a result of government policies (Chiew, 1968:73). Traditional occupational dividing lines are also being broken down through modern education. In the social and cultural spheres, various changes have also taken place. Increasing numbers of non-Malays are speaking Bahasa Malaysia today. The number of Chinese Muslim converts has also increased over the years.

These are some indications of changes that have been taking place in the Malaysian plural society. To some extent, they can be taken as changes in the degree of pluralism, namely that the Malaysian society is becoming less pluralistic. Having said this, we hasten to add that basically, the main plural features which developed during the colonial period still persist until the present day.



It is in this context that we attempt to analyse the Chinese community in the chapters that follow. Four major aspects of the community are highlighted, namely, the community's social structure, Chinese economic activities, Chinese politics and Chinese education. We are not so much concerned with the Chinese community in the ethnographic sense. Rather, our main emphasis is the implications of these various aspects of the Chinese community for the larger question of race relations. We shall argue that the various aspects of the Chinese community with their related institutions and values tend to make interaction and integration difficult in the conflict-prone plural society. On the other hand, despite the tremendous amount of dissensus and cleavages, Malaysia has managed to survive better than many other plural societies. Why is this so? What actually hold the Malaysian plural society together? These are some of the questions which we would try to answer in this study.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE STRATIFICATION AND STRUCTURE OF THE CHINESE COMMUNITY

In our 'Introduction' we have tried to analyse the central theme of British colonialism in Malaya, that of political and economic domination, as well as the structure of the Malayan plural society in general. It is against this wider background that we now look at the internal structure of the Chinese community.

#### Diversities

The Chinese in Malaysia are far from homogeneous. In fact they are the most diversified ethnic group among the local communities, being divided into various sub-communities or segments. It is this fact that has led some writers to apply a 'segmentary model' to analyse the Chinese community (Crissman, 1967:185-204). The most significant feature of the structure of the Chinese community is its dialect differences. There exist at least nine main different dialect groups speaking different and mutually unintelligible dialects. The Cantonese originated from the neighbourhood of Canton in China; the Hokkien from the neighbourhood of Amoy in southern Fukien; the Hakka from the inland areas of northern Kwangtung and southern Fukien; the Hainanese from the island of Hainan; the Teochiu from the Swatow area; the Hockchew from Foochow, the prefecture of Fukien; the

Henghua and Hockchia both from the Fukien Province, and the Kwangsai from the Kwangsi Province. There are various cultural traits distinguishing these dialect groups, but they are all equally good Chinese, at least in their own estimations.

One significant fact about these various dialect groups is that none of them can be connected with one particular Chinese province. This is largely because linguistic and administrative boundaries in China do not necessarily coincide. As a result, it is often difficult to draw hard and fast lines of division between one dialect group and another. The present dialect group classification in Malaysia, as in other overseas Chinese communities, is more of a common practice, because logically it is not easy to justify. For instance, Foochow is the capital of the Fukien Province, and logically Foochow-speaking people (Hockchew) should be classified as Fukienese; in actual practice, however, Foochow-speaking people have always been classified separately as a group. Under the heading 'Fukien' or Hokkien are placed only those who speak the southern Fukien dialect - Amoy. The situation is the same where the Cantonese people are concerned. The Teochius, the Hakkas and the Hainanese all come from the Kwangtung Province and should logically be placed under the regional grouping 'Cantonese'; but in practice these people are considered separately and only those from the central part of the Kwangtung Province speaking the Cantonese dialect proper are considered to be Cantonese (Tien, 1953:11).

The various Chinese dialect groups are not evenly distributed in Malaysia. The Cantonese tend to concentrate in urban centres such as Kuala Lumpur and Ipoh while the Hokkien concentrate in Penang, Taiping and Johore Bahru. Unevenness of this sort in regard to physical distribution is in part accounted for by the fact that Chinese emigrants tended to go to places where their relatives, friends or fellow villagers were already established. Wherever a dialect group is in the majority in an area, its dialect becomes more or less the 'lingua franca' of that area. Thus Cantonese becomes the 'lingua franca' of Kuala Lumpur and Ipoh; and Hokkien is the common dialect in Penang, Taiping and other areas where the Hokkien dominate. In the Sitiawan area where the Hockchew dominate, the Hockchew dialect becomes the common dialect for communication.

The dialect difference, though significant, is but one aspect of the diversities of the Chinese community. Along with dialect divisions is occupational specialization, often identifying with dialect groups. This identification of occupations with certain dialect groups was most notable in early colonial days. The Hokkien, for instance, were most active in trade; the bulk of the Cantonese were artisans and labourers (especially in tin mining and railway construction). The Hainanese were chiefly restauranteers and domestic servants; the Hakkas resembled the Cantonese in their economic activities, engaging primarily in handicrafts

such as shoe-making, tailoring, gold and silverware etc; many of them were also engaged in tin mining. The Hockchew were noted for their barber shops and coffee shop business. The Teochiu resembled the Hokkien in terms of economic activities, being mainly engaged in grocery business (Naosaku Uchida, 1956). The Henghua were and still are dominating bicycle and spare parts business.

This identification of dialect groups with economic activities parallels that drawn by Tien (1953) in Sarawak. Today the Chinese have penetrated into almost every sphere of economic activity in Malaysia and it is more difficult to identify them with any particular occupation. The new generation of Chinese, with modern education, tend to be less attached to their parents' traditional occupations and more inclined towards white-collar and professional jobs. Nevertheless the general pattern of occupational specialization along dialect lines still persists.

The political actions of the Chinese, like their dialect differences, are anything but uniform. The Chinese have been, indeed, described at one time or another as divided and disunited like a pan of loose sands. In the colonial era, they were divided between the right and the left - the Kuomintang and the communists. Since Malaya's independence in 1957, the Chinese have always been divided among the various Chinese political parties and parties which owe their existence to Chinese support. It is

rarely that the Chinese have themselves felt or have been seen as united (Wang, 1965:171). The Chinese participation in Malaysian politics will be discussed in Chapters three and four. Suffice it to say here that because of their disunited political actions and their relatively lack of interest in early Malaysian politics, they themselves were largely to blame for some of the government policies which worked to their disadvantage.

A further division which has often been said to have existed in the Chinese community is the English-educated and Chinese-educated dichotomy. Graduates from the two different media of education possess different values, style of life, and political positions, and their attitudes towards many important issues are thus different. For instance, on the whole the English-educated group have been more ready to be loyal to the new Malaysian nation while the Chinese-educated have more reservations and feel that independence gives them little advantage. They even find that their most-valued Chinese education is losing ground with the implementation of the government's new education policy (Wang, 1965:176). However, the two forms of education overlap and the division is perhaps not as deep as is often depicted. What both the English-educated and Chinese-educated have in common is the belief that as citizens of Chinese descent they have been unjustly discriminated in many ways.

There is also the division between the China-born and the local-born. The Chinese have settled in Malaysia for centuries and one of the results of which has been the establishment of a baba community. It consists of a small group of individuals whose origin can be traced to the early settlements of Malacca and Penang. They speak a form of colloquial Malay and their culture is a mixture of Chinese and Malay cultures. Culturally they have been more assimilated into the Malay society than the China-born or those born in the Malay states.

The contrast between the babas and the rest of the Chinese was particularly sharp before the war. While the baba was locally oriented, the China-born was more China-oriented. The baba, because of his inability to speak any Chinese dialect, was often regarded by the China-born as 'forgetting his ancestor' and 'un-Chinese'. In return, the China-born was often referred to as 'Chinaman'.

The babas formed a dominant element in the Malayan Chinese community in the nineteenth century, having been able to communicate either in Malay or English, or both, with the Malays and the British. Many of them enjoyed a kind of elite status during the colonial period.

However, with the influx of Chinese immigrants at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth

centuries, the baba community was progressively reduced in size. Also, with the rise of Chinese nationalism and education in Malaysia, a kind of 're-Sinification' process occurred in the baba community - a process by which the babas learned the Chinese language and culture and returned to the majority of the community.<sup>1</sup> Today, there is only a small group of babas in Malacca and Penang.

### Chinese Associations

The diversities in the Chinese community discussed above are manifested in the community's social organizations - commonly known as associations. Some studies have been made on these associations in Malaysia.<sup>2</sup> But most of these studies are historical in nature. A genuinely comprehensive sociological study on the subject is yet to be done. However, a few remarks on Chinese associations are in order to demonstrate the complexities of the social structure of the Chinese community.

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1. For a discussion of 're-Sinification' process, see Freedman (1969:431-449).
  2. The most notable of these are Wan (1967) and Chee (1971). Both are historical studies. While the former is confined to a particular state in Malaysia, the latter restricts its scope to a particular dialect group. There is, however, a sociological study which concentrates on the interlocking leadership structure of Chinese voluntary associations in the town of Muar. See Li (1965:1-45).



To begin with there are many types of Chinese associations. As a result some observers of the Chinese community have described the Chinese as having a 'passion' for organization (Hunter, 1966:43-44). The most common types of Chinese associations in Malaysia are dialect associations or huikuans as the Chinese call them, the surname associations, benevolent and charitable associations and the trade guilds.<sup>3</sup> These are what Crissman loosely

3. Wan listed a total of eleven types of Chinese associations and guilds in the state of Selangor. These are: (i) Huikuans (regional or dialect associations), (ii) Miao (temples), (iii) special welfare organization, (iv) guilds, (v) Tsung Ts'i (ancestral establishments of common surnames), (vi) cultural societies (libraries, amateur, dramatic and musical societies), (vii) benevolent societies (such as funeral and death-benefit), (viii) social clubs, (ix) sports clubs, (x) political organizations and (xi) general societies (alumni bodies, Chinese school committees associations etc). Li found a total of 66 voluntary associations in Muar (with a Chinese population of 24,775) which could be divided as follows:

A. <u>Non-community-wide Associations</u>	No.
1. Speech-group and local group associations	12
2. Surname or lineage associations	12
3. Business associations	15
4. Clubs and Recreational associations	17
5. Religious and benevolent associations	6
B. <u>Community-wide Associations</u>	
1. Board of Chung Hwa School	1
2. The Chinese Association of Muar	1
3. The Chinese Chamber of Commerce	1
4. The Malaysian Chinese Association	1
Total	66

Cf. Wan (1967, chapter 4) and Li (1965:43).

describes as the 'middle-range community organizations'.<sup>4</sup>

On a higher level, there exist the well-known and powerful Chinese Chambers of Commerce and the Chinese Assembly Halls. Every state in Malaysia has its own, administratively independent Chinese Chamber of Commerce.<sup>5</sup> The Chinese Assembly Hall too exists independently in every state. The objectives of the Chinese Assembly Halls vary from state to state. But what they have in common is the concern over the general well-being of the Chinese community as a whole such as the settling of disputes. A comparison of the stated objectives of two Chinese Assembly Halls in two different states will serve to illustrate their common aims as well as their variations.

The Perak Chinese Assembly Hall has its three-fold objectives as follows:

- a. to promote unity amongst the registered Chinese Associations in Perak and to promote friendship, welfare, charity and to settle dispute.

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4. Crissman describes these middle-range community organizations as something intermediate between village communities and language communities. According to Crissman, a 'village community' is a small, closely knit, face-to-face, usually corporate social unit, while a 'language' or 'speech' community is a larger entity such as the Hainanese community or the Teochiu community. What Crissman refers to as speech or language communities are actually dialect groups in Malaysia. Cf. Crissman (1967:191-2, 196).

5. Some states have more than one. For example, there are two in Perak, three each in Johore and Selangor.

- b. to cooperate with other registered Chinese Associations having objects similar to this Assembly Hall.
- c. to promote activities relating to culture, education, science, industry, music and sports.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, the objectives of the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall are:

- a. to hold meetings for the discussion of any subject of importance or interest to the Chinese community.
- b. to provide facilities for addresses, lectures or debates, marriages and other social functions.
- c. to provide a place for dramatic or theatrical purposes or performances.
- d. to receive or entertain distinguished personages.
- e. to settle disputes or difference that may arise between members of the Chinese community.
- f. to provide convenient accommodation for the Selangor Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the Selangor Miners' Association.<sup>7</sup>

It may also be said that all other Chinese Assembly Halls in Malaysia have objectives broadly similar to those stated above, with slight local variations.

In contrast, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in each state, as its name implies, is more concerned with trade and commerce of the Chinese in the state. The Selangor Chinese Chamber of Commerce, for example, has among its objectives 'to safeguard and promote the (Chinese) trading, industrial, mining and planting interests and the interests

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6. Rules of the Perak Chinese Association, p.1

7. Rules of the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall, p.1.

of immovable property owners!<sup>8</sup> However, because of their influential position in the community, the Chambers' activities are by no means restricted to trade and commerce. As we shall see later, they have been performing valuable community services.

An examination of the membership of both the Assembly Hall and Chamber of Commerce in each state shows that these higher level community organizations are closely related to the middle-range organizations. The Chamber of Commerce because of its interest in trade and commerce has its members largely consisting of various commercial firms, companies, merchant and trade guilds whilst the Chinese Assembly Hall mainly encompasses various dialect and surname associations. It is clear therefore, that the Chamber and the Assembly Hall are higher level of Chinese organizations encompassing the various middle-range organizations, which in turn consist of different individuals. Apart from corporate membership, it should be noted, however, that provisions are also made for individuals to become members of these higher level organizations. While the Chinese Chambers of Commerce in various states combine to form a national body known as the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce of Malaysia, there is not a national body representing the various Chinese Assembly Halls.

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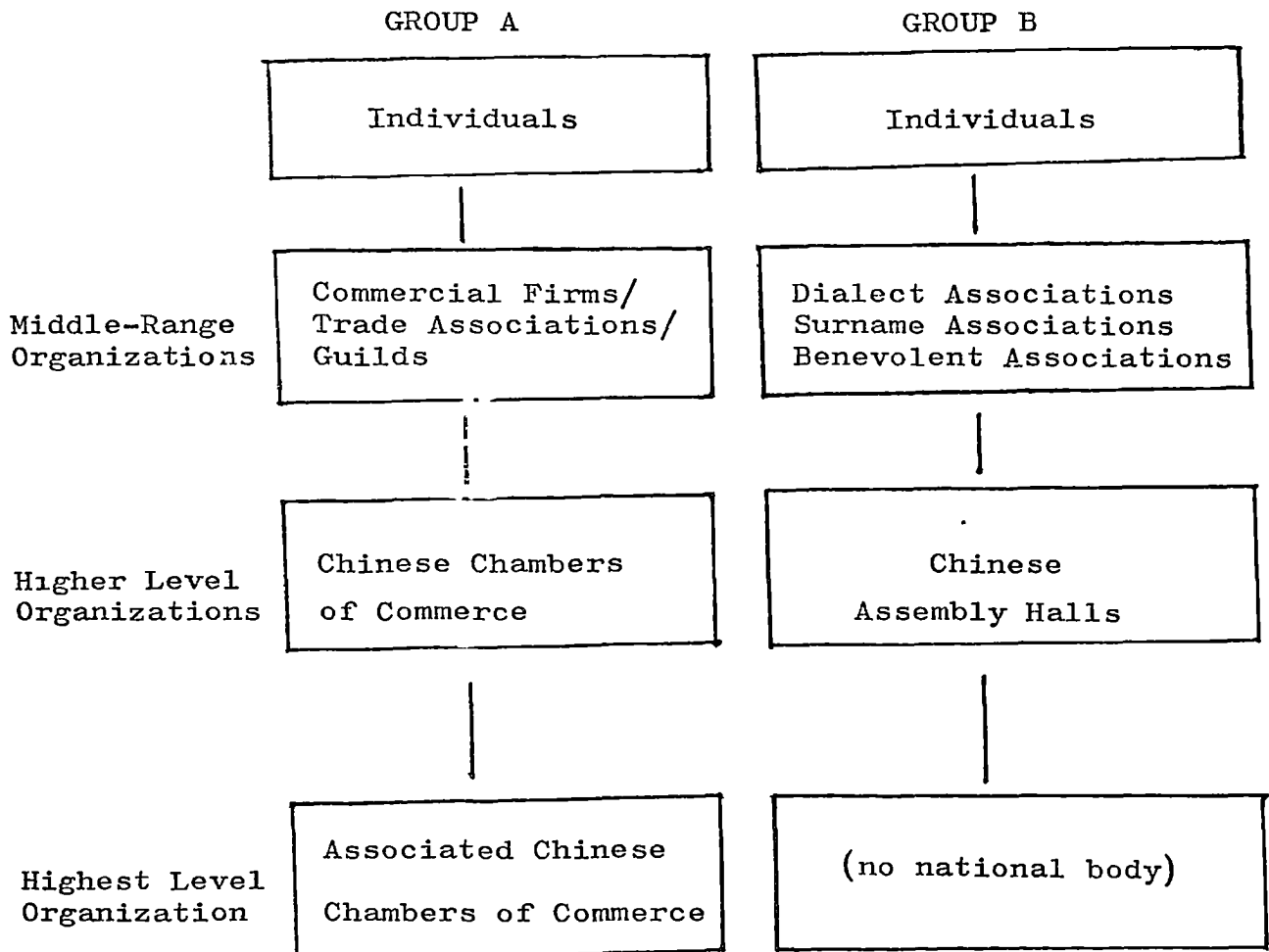
8. Rules of the Selangor Chinese Chamber of Commerce (1972), p.1.

Diagram 1.A may serve to illustrate the relationships between the higher level and the middle-range organizations. It would be a mistake, however, to regard Group A and Group B as separate entities. The two interact and overlap at various levels.

Before we examine the relationships between Group A and Group B, it is useful to look at the two groups separately. At the individual level, a person may become a member of a guild as well as a member of the Chamber of Commerce (since the Chamber has corporate membership as well as individual one). Overlapping membership is thus common. At another level, the corporate membership of a middle-range organization (e.g. a guild) in a higher level organization such as the Chamber of Commerce provides opportunities for the leaders of the former to hold office in the latter organization. Participation in one organization is no bar to participation in another. Thus one often finds that some prominent leaders are active in half a dozen or more community organizations. This is particularly evident near the top of the hierarchy, where a solid power base in lower level organizations, together with great wealth, is required to obtain a position (Crissman, 1967:199). This interlocking leadership of the various Chinese community organizations is not only true in Malaysia, it is true also in other parts of South-east Asia such as Indonesia and Thailand.<sup>9</sup>

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9. Cf. Willmott (1960) and Skinner (1958). The latter gives a detailed and excellent description of the system of interlocking leadership existing in the Chinese community in Bangkok.

Diagram 1.A Chinese Organizations

It provides an easy communication of information and influence among the various organizations and hence throughout the Chinese community. It also provides an efficient polity for the Chinese themselves, and at the same time it is useful to the government of the host countries in maintaining law and order among the Chinese minority (W.E. Wilmott, 1966:258). This last is especially true during the colonial era in Indonesia and Malaysia under the system of Kapitan China, a form of indirect rule. In Malaysia, as in Indonesia, most of the Kapitans appointed by the British colonial regime were powerful leaders of community organizations such as the secret societies.<sup>10</sup>

Positions in these community organizations are generally honorary and since the prestige structure of the community has largely developed from these organizations, it is an honour to hold office in any of them, especially those at a higher level.

However, in terms of prestige and power, not all associations rank equally high. In the prestige hierarchy the Chinese Chambers of Commerce and the Assembly Halls stand at the top of the list, followed by the larger

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10. For example, in the third quarter of the 19th century, in Perak, Kapitan Ah Kwee was the powerful leader of the Hai San secret society and Kapitan Ah Yam was the leader of the Ghee Hin secret society.

dialect associations, the benevolent associations and the trade guilds. Others such as the religious temples, cultural societies and social clubs are less prestigious and seldom exert any direct influence on community affairs. In general, however, it is largely through the leadership of associations that one's social recognition in the community is achieved.<sup>11</sup>

The principle of overlapping membership and interlocking leadership applies also to the Chinese Assembly Hall and its lower level affiliated organizations. Here, too, an individual may become a member of a dialect association, a member of a surname association, and a member of the Chinese Assembly Hall at the same time. While the third possibility is rare in practice, the first two are very common. The dialect and surname associations are the commonest organizations formed on the basis of two structural principles, namely, dialect and surname similarities respectively.<sup>12</sup> In addition, there are also associations formed on the basis of

11. Newell (1962:127) finds the even election to the school committee is an honour in itself.

12. The dialect associations (Huikuans) can usually be divided into three categories:

- a. District Associations - members restricted to a district (hsien) or a combination of two or more neighbouring districts in China. Example: the Kutien Association in Sitiawan.
- b. Prefectural Associations - members restricted to a prefecture, an administrative division comprising a number of districts. Example: the Foochow Association in Kuala Lumpur.
- c. Provincial Associations. Example: The Kwangtung Association.

Cf. Chee (1971:81-82) and Taku Suyama (1962:193-213).



shared locality. These various dialect, surname and locality associations together show the outward visible signs of the social structure of the Chinese community (Tien, 1953:19). It should be remembered that it is impossible to differentiate sharply between associations based on shared dialect, shared surname, shared locality, or even shared occupation. As indicated earlier, all these relationships tend to overlap. As a result, many members of an association organised on the basis, say, of surname, may also be related by the same locality, share the same occupation and speak the same dialect. Such an association, therefore, comprises, in the words of Tien (1953:19), 'a cluster of social relationships, usually embracing all the most significant aspects of Chinese social life'.

It remains now to consider the relationships between the Chinese Chambers of Commerce and their affiliated organizations on the one hand, and the Chinese Assembly Halls with their affiliations on the other. The two appear to be separated by their different concern over the Chinese community; nevertheless, they are as much related by interlocking leadership and overlapping membership as others. The Perak Chinese Assembly Hall and the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, for instance, have always been controlled by more or less the same group of wealthy and influential individuals. Moreover, a further look at the members of the General Committee, the governing body of the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall, is sufficient to show how closely related this Assembly Hall is with other organizations.

The General Committee consists of representatives from all the dialect, locality, surname associations in the state. In addition, it also comprises representatives from benevolent associations, guilds, Chinese Chamber of Commerce, the Miners' Association, the Malayan Estate Owners' Association and the Property Owners' and Rate Payers' Association.<sup>13</sup> In short, all Chinese interests are being represented in the Chinese Assembly Hall.

From the foregoing, it may be concluded that the whole social structure of the Chinese community in Malaysia is based on a complex network of inter-related guilds and associations. To a Chinese individual within it, the Chinese community appears to be a more or less self-contained and self-sufficient universe, within which the dialect groups are the main divisions and the associations based on dialect differences the major institutions.

Almost all Chinese associations are voluntarily organized. All of them, irrespective of their individual character, serve to provide mutual-aid functions. During the colonial days, especially at the peak of the Chinese immigration to Malaya, Chinese associations assisted the immigrants in their initial adjustments as well as helped them ease the

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13. Rules of the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall, pp.2-3.

disorganizing effect of subsequent misfortunes they might suffer in the new land.<sup>14</sup> Today, with no further immigration allowed from China, this aspect of the associations' function is no longer needed. Nevertheless, the associations' mutual-benefit functions still persist. Many associations continue to carry out worthy charitable work as well as to promote the welfare of their members. They provide bursaries, scholarships and even textbook money for members' children attending secondary schools and universities. Some associations even run private Chinese schools. The functions of associations are most aptly summed up by the words of Coughlin (1960:62) in his study of Thailand:

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14. Chee (1971:129-137) listed five functions of the Hakka Associations in the 19th century:
- a. to provide a framework of solidarity for immigrants;
  - b. to provide through its leaders community representation within the Chinese community as well as in their dealings with colonial government;
  - c. with the establishment of the association a social order which was a modified form of the village government at home in China familiar to the immigrant was set up;
  - d. to provide social services such as temporary lodgings for the newcomers, financial assistance to destitute members etc;
  - e. to organize social gatherings at festive seasons.

These associations, taken collectively, provide a continuing system of social insurance not only for the immigrant but for his family as well. In case of unemployment, sickness, death, natural calamity, quarrels and disputes, whether between groups or between individuals, some associations provide the required assistance. The individual never stands alone; even when he has no formal membership in the associations which furnish assistance, he is still entitled to receive their help.

Of all the Chinese organizations, the largest from the point of view of membership and probably the most influential are the Chinese Chambers of Commerce. As previously mentioned, these Chambers of Commerce exist independently in every state. Membership is open to all Chinese trade associations, commercial firms, companies and private individuals engaged in trade or commerce, industrial pursuits, mining or planting. Like all other Chinese organizations, the Chamber of Commerce conducts its day-to-day business mostly in Chinese, except when it deals with other non-Chinese organizations. Meetings are conducted in Chinese, and notices and publications are printed in Chinese.

The ostensible objective of the Chinese Chambers of Commerce is to promote and safeguard Chinese business interests. Yet their real activities go beyond the business interests. They have performed, and are still performing, valuable community services to the Chinese community. They are noted in taking a keen interest, so to speak, in matters affecting the Chinese community as a whole. A quick look at some of the activities carried

out by the Perak Chinese Chamber of Commerce (between 1966-71) illustrates clearly the Chamber's overall interests in the community as well as the nation as a whole.

- 1966 - The Chamber passed a resolution to support fully the National Language Month campaign and help commercial firms to translate their signboards from Chinese to the National Language (Malay).
- 1967 - A memorandum was sent to the Minister of Education requesting him to withdraw the proposal to increase school fees.
- 1968 - In response to the call made by the Malaysian Chinese School Teachers Association, a resolution was passed by the Chamber to fully support the establishment of a Chinese University.
- 1969 -
  - a. In view of the May 13 racial disturbance in Kuala Lumpur the Chamber set up a Relief Committee to which it contributed \$M500. The President and Secretary of the Chamber also went to various places to aid in good-will work.
  - b. A telegram was sent to the Prime Minister and his deputy to pledge the Chamber's allegiance and its support in the former's effort to maintain peace and prosperity in the country.
- 1970 -
  - a. The Chamber sent a memorandum to the State Government to protest against the State's new tax on land.
  - b. The Chamber, in cooperation with the Malay Chamber of Commerce, formed an Advisory Board for the Sino-Malay Economic Cooperation, Perak Branch.
- 1971 -
  - a. In view of the floods in various parts of the country, the Chamber formed a five-man committee to collect donations in cash and kind to aid the flood victims. A total of \$M13,250 was collected.
  - b. A telegram was sent to the Chinese leader, Tan Siew Sin to support him in the Chinese Unity Movement.<sup>15</sup>

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15. The Perak Chinese Chamber of Commerce, Report for 1971, pp.15-18.

The activities of the Perak Chinese Chamber of Commerce, in general, are representative of the functions of Chambers of Commerce in other states. In short, when matters of community-wide concern arise, one of the Chambers, or the national body, takes the initiative in calling a meeting of representatives of various organizations to decide on a proper course of action. For instance, in 1951, because of the publication of the Barnes Education Report which threatened the survival of Chinese education, the Perak Chinese Chamber of Commerce, in conjunction with the Perak Chinese Assembly Hall, took initiative to call a meeting of representatives of all Chinese organizations in Perak. The meeting passed a unanimous resolution to oppose the implementation of the Report.<sup>16</sup> In this case, therefore, the Chamber and the Assembly Hall acted as spokesmen for the Chinese community in Perak. The functions fulfilled by these overseas Chinese associations are by no means unique. To a large extent, associations in vastly different cultural areas from Malaysia, such as Sparkbrook, Birmingham, exhibit very similar functions. According to Rex (1973a: 22), the associations at Sparkbrook - the major ones being political parties, churches, immigrant associations and the community associations - fulfil four important functions, namely, overcoming social isolation, affirming cultural beliefs and values, goal attainment and pastoral work. Different types of Chinese associations may emphasize different functions. Yet generally speaking they fulfil in

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16. The Perak Chinese Chamber of Commerce, Report for 1971, p.10.

one way or another all the four major functions described by Rex.

It would be misleading to think that Chinese organizations do not change during all these years. The various dialect and clan associations, as Chee (1971:216-230) has observed, have become more and more ordinary social and recreational clubs, where members spend their leisure hours playing games, gambling and carrying out other cultural activities.

Newell (1962:153) has this to say in regard to the changed nature of the dialect associations:

Dialect associations are only successful where there are clear interests of the members to defend vis-a-vis other similarly constituted groups. Today Teochius have no special interests to defend that they do not have as Chinese and the dialect associations are social clubs and friendly societies only.

Another interesting thing about these associations is that they rarely exist in the Chinese 'new villages' formed during the Malaysian Emergency. There is also a low level of participation in associations by these new villagers. This is particularly true if the new villages are a great distance from towns where distance makes it more difficult for them to benefit from such membership. These new villages consist largely of rural Chinese who were forced to move away from the locale of their associations during the Emergency, and by so doing lost their membership by default (Nyce, 1973:124). A small number of them, however, still retain their membership in the associations.

The reasons for the virtual absence of dialect or surname associations in the new villages are threefold. In the first place, resettlement had a disorganizing effect which uprooted the villagers both economically and socially. In time of economic and social crisis, they were more concerned with their livelihood than to form associations.

Secondly, there was simply a lack of leadership in the new villages capable of, or willing to, organize the largely illiterate peasants along dialect or surname differences.

A third reason is that in some new villages, the rise of political party branches has supplanted the need to have dialect or territorial organizations. This is true especially among the younger generation, where association is based more upon interest than upon dialect similarity.

In his study of the Chinese new villages, Nyce (1973: 125-6) found that for all practical purposes, the political party branch has taken over the role of the association as an effective organization bringing people together for fellowship and concerted action.

In spite of the change in the nature and role of some dialect or territory-based associations, and the virtual absence of them in the new villages, the higher level organizations - the Chamber of Commerce and the Assembly Hall - are, if anything, becoming increasingly important in the community. They are as dynamic as ever, and the Chinese have always looked up to them for leadership in matters



affecting the community as a whole. This, then, is a unique aspect of the Chinese social structure.

Apart from serving the various specific social functions, the overall function of the Chinese associations is undoubtedly to bring together members of each dialect group. From the point of view of the Chinese community as a whole, the function of uniting each dialect group has its dysfunctional aspect too. The various territorial and dialect associations tend to perpetuate provincialism and parochialism, and become obstacles to Chinese unity in the wider sense.

What is important, however, is not so much how this Chinese passion for organization is dividing the Chinese community itself, but its implications in terms of race relations in the plural society of Malaysia.

The various Chinese institutions such as the dialect associations tend to give the non-Chinese, especially the Malays, the impression that Chinese 'stick together'. They then become, in the eyes of the Malays, non-national, if not anti-national. Accusations of Chinese in-group sentiments such as being clannish and refusing to assimilate are not uncommon. Indeed, Chinese associations do serve to perpetuate social distinctions between the Chinese and the Malays hindering social integration between the two groups. In Thailand, where Chinese form less than 10% of the total Thai population, Coughlin (1960:66) has this to say about their associations:

These overseas associations in their totality are so influential in perpetuating social distinctions between the Thais and Chinese population groups that their continued vitality as going institutions beyond the immigrant generation can only mean the indefinite postponement of any major move toward a more thorough assimilation of the Chinese minority in Thailand.

To a large extent, the above observation made by Coughlin in Thailand is also true in Malaysia. The exceptionally strong numerical strength of the Chinese makes racial problem in Malaysia a unique case in South-east Asia. In Malaysia the Chinese are a significant minority. Their institutional, social and economic framework is so well entrenched in the plural society and yet so distinct from that of the Malay community that the term 'assimilation' as used to analyse other parts of South-east Asia is scarcely relevant here. In the foreseeable future, there seems little chance that the Chinese community as a whole will be assimilated. Many factors are believed to act in one way or another to hinder the process, and some of the major ones will be looked into in the chapters that follow.

### Stratification

We have so far been concerned only with group divisions or differentiation along vertical lines. The remaining chapter is devoted to another dimension of the division in the Chinese community, namely, the division along horizontal lines or stratification.

To begin with, it is difficult to analyse the structure of the Malaysian Chinese community in terms of class distinctions in the Marxian sense. There are at least two reasons for this. First, Malaysia, unlike many western industrial societies, is still at an early stage of industrial development. Class divisions on the basis of differential relations to the means of production are yet to be meaningful among the bulk of the Chinese as well as other ethnic groups. In so far as the Chinese are concerned, a large proportion of them still live in small towns and new villages created as a result of the Malaysian Emergency.<sup>17</sup> Although to a certain extent class approach is helpful for a study of large urban centres like Kuala Lumpur and Penang, it is certainly premature to talk about the rural Chinese in class terms.<sup>18</sup> They are politically less sophisticated and economically and technologically more backward compared to the urban folk.

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17. In 1970, 53% of the total Chinese population were rural. See Saw Swee Hock (1972:119).

18. This view is shared by Wang (1965:171). Nyce (1973: 145-6) in his study of Chinese new villages is of the opinion that the Chinese new villagers differentiate themselves on a class basis, such as between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. The present writer while agreeing that such may be the case in villages close to urban centres, still feels that the majority of the villagers do not see themselves in such class terms.

Second, with the exception of some western educated elite and the group which thinks entirely in terms of left-wing and right-wing politics, there is still little class consciousness among the Chinese. This is of course not to say that the Chinese are not aware of the status hierarchy that has existed in their community. Far from it. Indeed, the Chinese are highly status conscious. It simply means that for the majority, class distinctions in the form of bourgeoisie versus proletariat or even in the western form of middle class versus working class are still vague in their mind.

It is even doubtful, giving the diversity and heterogeneity of the community, whether there exists a class-in-itself, let alone a class-for-itself. Even if they exist, many Chinese certainly do not think of themselves in such terms.

Nevertheless it would be misleading to regard this situation of the Chinese community as a permanent feature in a rapidly developing and changing society like Malaysia. There is a possibility that the rapidly changing economic conditions will eventually transform the bulk of the population into workers with common situations and interests as a result of the domination of capital. This class-in-itself may finally develop its class consciousness, unity, and organizations for the defence of its class interests, and become a class-for-itself (Bottomore & Rubel, 1961:195).

Whether this situation will emerge in the long run is not our concern here. What we are more interested, however, is that at the moment class distinctions are less meaningful and less significant than ethnic divisions. For instance, many political parties are still communally-based. Even the clandestine class-based Malaysian Communist Party, whose membership is largely Chinese, receives limited support from the Malays.

The Chinese, however, do have a general awareness, albeit a vague one, of the existence of three major groups in their midst: a small group of rich people, a large group of poor, rural people and between the two groups are what they call the 'middle-class' people. In terms of a pyramid, these groups can be represented thus: the small group of rich people forms the apex with the 'middle-class' people at the middle and the rural folk forming the base. This, then, is the nearest thing to stratification in the Chinese community.<sup>19</sup> The division is based not so much upon a difference between employers and employees as upon different degrees of economic well-being. Furthermore, there is also the variation from person to person as to the perception of the size and boundaries of each category (Willmott, 1960: 122).

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19. Willmott (1960) observes a similar phenomenon in Semarang.

There are perhaps a number of reasons hindering the emergence of distinct socio-economic classes and class consciousness in the Chinese community. Mobility, both occupational and social, is certainly one important factor. There is a high degree of occupational and social mobility in the Chinese community. Opportunities in education, industry and commerce all contribute to this phenomenon. With educational achievement, a considerable number of children from poor family background rise to positions of importance, both in professional and civil service. Many employees, with their hard work and initiative, coupled with the prevailing industrial and commercial opportunities, become independent and successful businessmen. In addition, there is a considerable amount of ups and downs of family fortunes, due partly to the typical instability of Chinese business enterprise.

Along with the lack of class consciousness, there is a parallel absence of class antagonism and 'class struggle' in the Chinese community. There are few specifically Chinese employee organizations.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, Chinese membership in multi-racial unions has always been low. The Chinese have never seemed to show a keen interest in trade unionism.<sup>21</sup>

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20. This is also true of the Chinese in Thailand and Indonesia. Cf. Willmott (1960:120) and Coughlin (1960:62).

21. The Chinese in Malaysia have always been reluctant to participate in trade unions. In 1952, for example, Chinese only formed 15% of the total union membership; in 1961, they formed only 17%. More recent figures are not available, but it is believed that the figure for Chinese is still low in comparison to their working force. Cf. Purcell (1954:178) and Milne (1967:110).

The relationship between the Chinese employers and employees has often been one which is cordial rather than antagonistic. This is particularly so in small-scale businesses where the majority of the employees are related to their employers by kinship or marriage ties. At any rate, business class values are accepted by most of the employees who aspire and seek material success and whose ultimate aim is to join the business class themselves some day.

As earlier mentioned in connection with class consciousness, the Chinese in Malaysia are highly status conscious. Their present status hierarchy, though greatly modified, has its origin as far back as the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. - 9 A.D.). The ideal form of status hierarchy accepted then was:

The Ideal Traditional Status Hierarchy

Shih	=	scholar-officials
Nung	=	peasants and farmers
Kung	=	artisans
Shang	=	merchants and shopkeepers

(Wang, 1965:172)

In practice, however, the ideal hierarchical position was constantly undermined by the importance of wealth as a variable in social mobility. And since the Sung Dynasty (960-1275), the real status of the merchants had, in all but name, moved up to the second place, pushing the peasants and farmers to the lowest stratum. The modified hierarchy

which actually existed was:

The Real Traditional Status Hierarchy

Shih	=	scholar-officials
Shang	=	merchants and shopkeepers
Kung	=	artisans
Nung	=	peasants and farmers

(Wang, 1965:173)

In Malaysia, as in many other South-east Asian countries where the Chinese formed a minority group, this traditional status scheme had been turned upside down. This is accounted for by the special nature of Chinese emigration. The Chinese had gone overseas in search of wealth, and trade and commerce were the only sources of wealth available to them. As a result, wealth became practically the sole criterion of success and social status. The scholar-officials generally did not emigrate. The few who did go abroad to become clerks and teachers were considered no better than superior artisans. Most of the immigrants were petty merchants, illiterate peasants and labourers; and vast numbers of the latter two categories became plantation and mining labourers. Thus, there were broadly only two major divisions in the Chinese community in Malaysia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries - merchants and those who aspired to be merchants (Wang, 1965:173). Both the scholar-officials, the most powerful and prestigious group, and the peasants, the most



numerous group in China, found no Chinese equivalents in Malaysia. In Malaysia the upper portion of the Chinese social status scale was almost completely dominated by the merchants (Shang), while the kung (artisans, labourers, clerks etc.) occupied the lower portion.

This situation of merchant-dominated overseas Chinese in Malaysia lasted until the second decade of the twentieth century. The Revolution of 1911 in China stirred up Chinese nationalism among the overseas Chinese, and everywhere the Chinese began to show a keen interest in their education and schools. In Malaysia, there arose a great enthusiasm to learn the Chinese Kuo-Yu in the 1920's and 1930's. Many Chinese schools were established to provide learning opportunities to Chinese children, and by 1941, a whole generation of educated young Chinese emerged. This young educated group consisted largely of teachers coming from China and those who came back from China after they had received their higher education. This group of educated elite was highly respected and was equated in the Chinese mind with some kind of modernized shih (Wang, 1965:174).

Along with this Chinese-educated group, there was a group of Chinese who were educated in English schools. Those who were successful became professional men such as lawyers, doctors and accountants. The less successful ones became teachers and clerks. There were others who joined the civil service. This English-educated group was equally

respected, not so much on the basis of wealth, but because of its association with specialized profession and public office.

Thus, since 1941, particularly after the Second World War, along with wealth, education has become an important factor in social mobility in the Chinese community. This, in part, is a reflection of the traditional value attached to education. With education as a new variable, the post-war social hierarchy of the Chinese can thus be schematically represented as follows:

The Post-War Status Hierarchy<sup>22</sup>

1. Shih, = educated elite (professional men,  
civil servants,  
teachers etc)
2. Shang = merchants and shopkeepers
- 3.i) Kung = a. artisans  
b. urban workers  
c. labourers
- 3.ii) Nung = peasants and farmers

It must be noted that these are ideal-type situations. The classification is by no means absolute. As in any other classifications, there may be individuals who deviate from, or who refuse to be fitted into the scheme. Looking at the

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22. Wang (1965:175) did not include the category of peasants and farmers in his scheme. This writer, however, feels that the Chinese peasants and farmers are too important to be excluded. It is rather difficult, however, to rank the kung and nung, especially in terms of wealth and style of life. Because of this, the two groups are being put in the same category.

Chinese community as a whole, it is sometimes rather difficult to disentangle and compare the prestige values of wealth and education. The two variables often seem to go hand in hand. People with high academic or professional qualifications generally come from well-to-do families and earn high incomes. In other words, education often appears intertwined with monetary success.

Nevertheless, education may be a sufficient, but definitely not a necessary condition to high social status. Quite a number of influential and respected Chinese community leaders receive little formal education. But almost without exception they possess the other important variable - wealth. It would seem, therefore, that wealth is much more important as a determinant of social status than education.<sup>23</sup>

From the preceding sections, it is not an overstatement to say that the Malaysian Chinese are wealth conscious, education conscious and status conscious. The Chinese community in Malaysia is, indeed, like many overseas Chinese communities in other parts of South-east Asia, a plutocracy in which wealth breeds prestige and power (Crissman, 1967: 199). Leadership is mainly based on either wealth or education, or both.

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23. This condition can also be found in other South-east Asian Chinese communities. Indonesia is one example. Cf. Wilmott (1960:117).

Thus, what we have in the Chinese community is a social order which, as it is objectively understood by outside observers and subjectively understood by the Chinese themselves, is heterogeneous and divided. The community is divided both horizontally and vertically. The horizontal lines of division are based largely upon wealth and education. The vertical lines are, on the other hand, based upon group affiliations, mainly along lines of dialect differences.<sup>24</sup> It must be stressed, however, that none of these dividing lines is distinctly fixed. They are merely social boundaries which are frequently criss-crossed by other such forms of relationships as friendships, marriages and social interactions.

As a concluding remark, it should be noted that these internal divisions are by no means permanent features in the Chinese community. They apply only in so far as the Chinese are interacting among themselves. Within a larger context, namely, in the context of the plural society of Malaysia, racial bonds are still strong. Vis-a-vis the non-Chinese, these ranks are largely closed whenever external threats to racial interests arise. It is from this perspective that we now proceed in the next chapter to examine the role of the Chinese in Malaysian economy.

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24. In Indonesia Willmott (1960) has observed more or less a similar form of divisions in the Chinese community. But in regard to vertical divisions, there is an extra dimension in Indonesia - that of Totok-Peranakan distinction, which has no equivalents in present-day Malaysia. The baba population in Malaysia, often regarded as Peranakan's counterpart, has become very insignificant today.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE CHINESE IN MALAYSIAN ECONOMY

#### Introduction

Economic imbalance between the Chinese and the Malays, with its related occupational separation, is still one of the striking features of Malaysia's social structure, and constitute a major source of conflict between the two peoples. The relatively active participation of the Chinese in Malaysian economy, especially their overwhelming concern for commercial activities, has given rise to the common view that the Chinese as a community are wealthy and in control of the nation's economy. In terms of race relations, it is not really so important whether this popular view is true. The important point is that most of the Malays believe this to be true and this often determines their attitudes towards the Chinese (Vasil, 1971:5).

Coughlin (1955:311; 1960:12) suggests that the Chinese minority in Thailand furnishes an illustration of immigrant adjustment in a social context traditionally characterised by a two-fold division of the population into the ruling class and the peasantry, where there was virtually no indigenous development of trade and commerce apart from some dealings in local agricultural produce and locally-made handicrafts. Much the same can be said of the Chinese in Malaysia, even though they constitute a significant minority

in comparison with Thailand. On the eve of British colonial rule, there existed in Malaysia many states, each independent of one another, and like many underdeveloped countries, each was characterized by a two-fold division between the aristocracy (the ruling class) and the peasantry (the subject class). Each state was essentially agricultural and there was little indigenous development of trade and commerce. However, with the introduction of British rule and the consequent impact of westernization and modernization, the situation changed drastically. First there was a great expansion in commerce, resulting in increasing opportunities in commercial activities, particularly in retail trade. Secondly, there was an increasing need for commercial intermediaries to funnel imported consumer goods to the mass of the population. It was here that the Chinese (to a smaller extent the Indians too), as an immigrant group, readily took advantage of these new commercial opportunities and worked themselves into privileged economic as well as social positions. Such an immigrant adjustment seems to be a normal process given the fact that during those days most of the Chinese immigrants hoped to amass a fortune and return to their homeland, and commerce was the only opportunity open to them to achieve their ambitions. Moreover, the indigenous people were very tradition-bound and commercial activities did not attract them since they fell largely outside the framework of their traditional class and

occupational structure. Many Chinese had, in effect, come to fill what Rinder (1958-59:253-260) has called the 'status gap' in the way the Jews had filled a similar gap in Europe, the Armenian Christians in Turkey, the Parsees in India, the Indians in East Africa and Burma, and the Syrians in West Africa (Wertheim, 1964:75).

There is little doubt that the Chinese have contributed a great deal in the development of Malaysia. Their contribution began in 1786 when Penang was acquired by the British by treaty with the Sultan of Kedah. The development and prosperity of the Straits Settlements was in the main the product of British initiative coupled with Chinese labour. From the Straits Settlements, many Chinese penetrated the Malay States and helped to open up vast areas of virgin territory. Many of the tin mines today were and still are worked by the Chinese; the rubber plantations depend on the Chinese for much of their labour while the small traders, the artisans, the urban workers and the employees of great merchants and firms have been largely Chinese. The Chinese, many of whom originally came to Malaysia as what Rex calls 'secondary colonialists'<sup>1</sup> are, however, not merely confined to these subordinate positions. Today, many of them are highly qualified professional men in various

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1. According to Rex (1970a:75), secondary colonialists "include capitalist entrepreneurs seeking opportunities in mining, in manufacture and marketing, small-scale traders and shopkeepers and workers having a greater degree of freedom than the native workers or slaves who preceded them".

fields and a good proportion of the country's wealthiest and influential businessmen are Chinese too.

The important role of the Chinese in the development of Malaysia is borne out by the testimony of many of the British colonial administrators who served there at one time or another. Captain Light, for example, regarded the Chinese immigrants as 'the most valuable part of our inhabitants'. Crawford viewed the Chinese as 'the most industrious and useful portion of the Asiatic part of the population'. Newbold considered the Chinese to be 'by far the most useful class in the Straits Settlements'. Frank Swettenham and George Maxwell went even further. The former suggested that 'their (Chinese) energy and enterprise have made the Malay States what they are today' (Mills, 1966: 204), while the latter described the Chinese as 'the real pioneers and makers of modern Malaya' (Maxwell, 1943:116).

All this merely indicates the appreciation of the colonialists with regards to the important role of the Chinese in the making of Malaysia. It should not be taken to imply that other local communities are unimportant or less important. Their role, however, falls beyond the scope of this study.

Chinese contribution to Malaysian economy is beyond any doubt. They are found in significant proportions in almost every sector of the nation's economy and at all levels of activity. They were, and still are, the community that



covers the widest range of occupations. Vaughan, for instance, was so impressed by the wide range of occupations carried out by the Chinese immigrants and their hard work that he even went so far as to say that 'the Chinese are everything'. He then went on listing more than a hundred types of activities or occupations in which the Chinese were engaged, ranging from such unskilled labour as opium seller, fruit-seller, hawker to skilled ones as engineers, architects and surveyors (Vaughan, 1971:16).

However, the great contribution of the Chinese to Malaysian economy should not be equated with the popular stereotype that they dominate the nation's economy. These are two related yet different things. The stereotype is the result of at least two factors. First, the Chinese are largely urban people and they are almost ubiquitous in every major Malaysian town. Secondly, they are engaged in almost every kind of economic activity, particularly in the conspicuous commercial activities such as retail trade. The stereotype is reinforced by the fact that a good number of urban Chinese are actually wealthy.

The presence of racial stereotypes such as that related to the Chinese economic domination in Malaysia is not an unusual phenomenon in a plural society. It is so widely accepted that the truth of the statement is seldom questioned. Do the Chinese really control the Malaysian economy? If the measure of domination of an economy is in terms of the ownership and control of the various factors of production, then

the stereotype of Chinese economic domination is a misconception, or at best a partial truth. As will be shown presently, the Chinese do not control the Malaysian economy.

The bulk of the evidence shows that the Europeans were and still are in control of a major proportion of the Malaysian economy. Undoubtedly, of the three local communities, the Chinese have been most actively involved in the nation's economic activities, and in relation to other local communities, their capital is by far the most important. It can thus be said that the Chinese capitalists are the most important local capitalists (Puthucheary, 1960:133). This, however, by no means implies that all Chinese are rich. Neither are all of them capitalists. To treat the Chinese as a single economically homogeneous group is a gross oversimplification. They are simply too large a population to form a homogeneously middle-class group. Even though Malaysia's commercial and industrial middle-class has been predominantly their preserve, some three-quarters of the Chinese belong to the working class (Freedman, 1960:163). There is no doubt that a significant proportion of the Chinese are engaged in small-scale businesses of one form or another, and it is in these that they are most conspicuous and attract the most attention. But in terms of wealth they are widely diversified, ranging from millionaires to paupers.

In the sections that follow an attempt is made to examine the Chinese role in Malaysian economy and their relative economic strength in relation to other communities. Following this, the government's efforts to correct the economic imbalance will also be reviewed and their effects on the Chinese community assessed.

### The Chinese in Commerce

Many observers of the overseas Chinese in South-east Asia agree that commerce is the latter's forte.<sup>2</sup> The Malaysian Chinese fit well into this observation. Precise statistics are not available, but it was estimated that in 1962, out of a total of 112,736 businesses operating in the country, over 80,000 were run by the Chinese.<sup>3</sup> This means that the Chinese operated about 70% of all businesses. In terms of employment, a more up-to-date data show that in 1970, the Chinese accounted for 65.3% of all people engaged in commerce, as against 23.5% Malays, 10.7% Indians and 0.5% others (Table 2.1).

These figures clearly indicate that the Chinese predominate in the country's commercial activities. What is not apparent from these figures is the type of businesses in which the Chinese are engaged. It is generally believed

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2. See, for example, Coughlin (1960), chapter six; Willmott (1960), chapter three and Tien (1953).

3. These were all registered businesses. Some small-scale Chinese businesses were not registered. Cf. Dale (1962:552).

that the majority are retail businesses dealing with consumer goods.

Many factors have contributed to the dominant position of the Chinese in domestic commerce. Cultural explanations such as industriousness, having more business acumen than the natives and capable of improvising at short notice are not uncommon (Mahathir, 1970:50). One writer even went so far as to claim that the Chinese virtues were perhaps shared equally by the buffalo (Tay, 1962:37). Another writer attributed the economic success of the Chinese to their sophistication in the handling of money.<sup>4</sup> Still another writer argued that apart from hard work and sophistication in the handling of money and credit, the Chinese were 'much more skilled at turning a social and political situation to their own financial advantage' and that 'their prosperity .... is a result of their capacity to profit from colonial rule by others' (Silcock, 1965:183).

While all these factors might have been possible reasons at one time or another, an important historical factor should not be overlooked. This is that, at all times government regulations discriminated against the Chinese in the government service in favour of the indigenous people. This led the Chinese to look more and more to the increasingly

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4. According to Freedman (1959:64-65), "The Chinese were economically successful in South-east Asia not simply because they were energetic immigrants, but more fundamentally because in their quest for riches they know how to handle money and organize men in relation to money".

expanding opportunities in commercial pursuits which were not attractive to the Malays who, because of their feudalistic attitudes and traditions, were more inclined to seek employment in government service. Other reasons favouring the Chinese will be discussed in the sections that follow.

### The Characteristics of Chinese Business Enterprise

The most striking feature of the Chinese business enterprise in Malaysia, as in other South-east Asian countries such as Thailand and Indonesia, is its familism. This is to say that the business is essentially a family enterprise often employing family members exclusively. When outsiders are employed, they are often related to the owner in one way or another. The business is often passed on from the father to the son or sons. The family is the core of the business. It is the basic economic as well as occupational unit. Because of this family-centred nature of the business, it is often rightly said that to become associated with the business, one must first become part of the family. This is relatively easy for a Chinese who speaks the same dialect as the owner of the business. In the case of a non-Chinese it is a very difficult matter. For one thing he is handicapped by the lack of knowledge of the Chinese language which is so essential in Chinese business. Secondly, many Chinese businessmen are prejudiced against the non-Chinese especially the Malays, who are considered to be lazy, stupid, and lack business acumen.<sup>5</sup>

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5. It is interesting to note that a similar prejudice against the natives exists in Thailand. Cf. Coughlin (1960:122).

This partly explains why only an insignificant number of Malays have been employed by Chinese business enterprises.

A second characteristic of the Chinese business organization is its small-scale operation, with little capital or management resources. In 1973, out of 120,000 registered Chinese businesses operating in West Malaysia, (which amounted to 71% of the total registered businesses in the country), as many as 65% are in the retail trade.<sup>6</sup> As Tan Siew Sin aptly puts it, "the bulk of them (Chinese merchants and traders) are shopkeepers, large and small, but mostly small retailers and distributors". (Straits Times, September 3, 1972).

This leads to a third characteristic - informal organization. Being small, most Chinese businesses are organized informally, in that there is no fixed system of accounting, prices are often flexible and written agreements are rare. Employment in Chinese firms is also secured informally, often through the recommendations of friends and relatives. This informal system of recruitment is not without consequences. It tends to favour relatives against non-relatives and members of one's own dialect group against other dialect speakers and finally it works to discriminate

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6. Figures taken from Malaysian Business, "Why do so many Chinese family businesses remain small?" February, 1973, p.43.

non-Chinese in favour of Chinese. Both these characteristics of informality and familism discussed above are important factors favouring Chinese control of commerce to the disadvantage of the non-Chinese.

Instability is another feature of Chinese business enterprise. Constant failures in businesses have given rise to the saying that Chinese enterprises seldom last more than three generations. Unwise speculation, fluctuating world market prices are some of the reasons. More significantly, the relatively small scale of their business enterprise and the consequent lack of capital and management knowledge give no room for expansion. The business either remains small or sinks. In many cases there is no one to take over the father's enterprise and the business dies with the father.

Recently, concern has been shown over the future of Chinese small-scale family businesses in the wake of Malaysia's industrialization and modernization under the New Economic Policy. Tan Siew Sin, the Malaysian Finance Minister, addressing a MCA Annual Assembly, said, "far too many of our businesses are family businesses which, by their very nature, are unable to adapt themselves to take advantage of the opportunities available." Tan even went to the extent of describing family businesses as "the bane of the Chinese community" because "quite often they become smaller, instead of larger with the passage of time". (Straits Times, September, 3, 1972).

While the description of family trade as the bane of the Chinese community may be an overstatement, it is nevertheless true that most Chinese family businesses have remained small. A host of factors are believed to have contributed to this state of affairs. One important reason concerns the nature of Chinese family enterprises. As indicated earlier, the bulk of them are small retailers engaging in buying or selling. Moreover, many of these retail businesses are located in, and serve particular areas. There is strictly no basis for them to expand.

Equally important is the economic reason. Being small, most Chinese family enterprises lack capital or management resources, which in many ways restrict the growth of the businesses. (Malaysian Business, Feb. 1973:43).

Thus far we have discussed some of the factors contributing to the dominant position of the Chinese in commerce and some features characteristic of Chinese business enterprise. It is true that small-scale commercial activities are largely controlled by the Chinese. But it is not the same as saying that the Chinese control trade and commerce of the country. It is the foreign companies owned by Europeans that really control Malaysia's trade and commerce. Before Independence, it was estimated that European-owned firms controlled about 70% of both Malaysia's export and import trade (Puthucheary, 1960: xiv-xv). In 1970 of the total \$M5,289 million share capital, as many as 60.7% was



accounted for by foreign interests compared with 22.5% by Chinese, 1.9% by Malays and 1.0% by Indians. In commerce, the Chinese accounted for 30.4% of the share capital, as against 63.5% by Europeans, 0.8% by Malays and 0.7% by Indians (see Table 2.2). These figures indicate that a large proportion of Malaysia's commerce is still in the hands of the foreigners, but among the local communities, it is true that Chinese have the largest share.

### The Chinese in Manufacturing Industries

The Census of Manufacturing Industries, West Malaysia, listed a total of 9,013 manufacturing establishments operating in the country in 1968. These included among others, the manufacturing of food products, beverage, tobacco, processing of estate-type agricultural products off-estates, textiles, footwear, furniture and fixtures, paper products, printing and publishing, chemicals and chemical products, rubber products, mineral products, metal products, machinery and transport equipment.<sup>7</sup> For one reason or another, the Census did not provide a racial breakdown of ownership. Neither did it show the racial composition of the labour force. This makes it difficult for us to assess the extent of Chinese participation in manufacturing industries.

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7. Department of Statistics, Census of Manufacturing Industries, West Malaysia, 1968, p.17, Table 1.

Table 2.1: Employment by race and sector, West Malaysia, 1970.

Numbers in '000	Malay Nos. %	Chinese Nos. %	Indian Nos. %	Others Nos. %	Total* % of total employment
Agriculture, forestry fisheries	925.4 67.6	293.0 21.4	138.3 10.1	12.3 0.9	1,369 49.1
Mining & quarrying	21.1 24.8	56.1 66.0	7.1 8.4	0.7 0.8	85 3.1
Manufacturing	84.4 28.9	191.0 65.4	15.5 5.3	1.2 0.4	292 10.5
Construction	16.9 21.7	56.2 72.1	4.7 6.0	0.2 0.2	78 2.8
Electricity, water & sanitary service	10.2 48.5	3.8 18.0	6.8 32.3	0.3 1.4	21 0.8
Transport, storage & communications	49.0 42.6	45.5 39.6	19.7 17.1	0.8 0.7	115 4.1
Commerce	69.3 23.5	192.6 65.3	31.6 10.7	1.5 0.5	295 10.6
Services	256.1 48.5	188.5 35.7	73.9 14.0	9.5 1.8	528 19.0

\* Totals do not add because of rounding

Source: Mid-term Review of the Second Malaysia Plan, 1971-75.

Table 2.2: % ownership of share capital of limited companies by race and sector, West Malaysia 1970.

Sector	Malay	Chinese	Indian	Foreign	Total \$'000
Agriculture, forestry & fisheries	0.9	22.4	0.1	75.3	1,432,400
Mining & quarrying	0.7	16.8	0.4	72.4	543,497
Manufacturing	2.5	22.0	0.7	59.6	1,348,245
Construction	2.2	52.8	0.8	24.1	58,419
Transport & Communications	13.3	43.4	2.3	12.0	81,887
Commerce	0.8	30.4	0.7	63.5	605,164
Banking & Insurance	3.3	24.3	0.6	52.2	636,850
Others	2.3	37.8	2.3	31.4	582,516
Total M\$'000	102,611	1,192,083	52,402	3,207,889	5,288,978
in %	1.9	22.5	1.0	60.7	-

The total includes \$743 million share capital held by Federal, State governments and others which are excluded from racial shares.

Source: Mid-term Review of the Second Malaysia Plan 1971-75.

However, in terms of employment by ethnic groups, some light can be gleaned from the 1957 Population Census. In the manufacturing sector the total economically active population in 1957 was 135,382 of which 97,502 were Chinese, 26,588 Malays and 10,086 Indians and the remainder others.<sup>8</sup> This means that in terms of employment the Chinese accounted for approximately 72% of the total as compared to 20% Malays. The figures for 1970 were more revealing. The figure for the Chinese had dropped to 65.4% while Malay employment in manufacturing had increased to 28.9% (Table 2.1). The increase of Malay employment was largely the result of the government's imposition of the racial quotas in the recruitment of factory employees.

As in commerce, manufacturing industries in Malaysia have never been controlled by the Chinese. In terms of share capital in manufacturing, of the total \$M1,348 million in 1970, only 22% was owned by the Chinese, as compared to 59.6% foreign interests, 2.5% Malays and 0.7% Indians (Table 2.2).

The majority of the Chinese firms are under individual proprietorships and partnerships with small capital. Though such firms accounted for as many as 86% of the total manufacturing establishments in 1969, they only contributed 22% in terms of value added and 10% in terms of capital assets (Second Malaysia Plan:151).

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8. 1957 Population Census of the Federation of Malaya, Report No. 14, Table 11.

### The Chinese in Mining

The main minerals mined in Malaysia are tin, iron, bauxite and crude oil. In terms of employment, value added and foreign exchange earned, tin is by far the most important of the minerals.<sup>9</sup>

In 1967, in terms of employment 68,000 persons were engaged in various mining and quarrying activities. Of these 58,000 were engaged in tin-mining. Although mining only constituted less than 2.5% of the employed labour force and 7% of the GDP at that time, mineral products amounted to over 30% of the value of exports. By mid-1970 the number in employment in mining dropped to 64,000 and output to 6.5% of the GDP, and mineral products accounted for 29% of the total export earnings.<sup>10</sup>

Mining is another sector where Chinese labour predominates. In 1967, for example, the Chinese constituted 67.2% of the employed labour force. The figures for Malays and Indians were 21.4% and 10.3% respectively (Second Malaysia Plan:173). The corresponding figures for 1970 still show Chinese predominance in mining activities, even though their percentage

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9. In 1971 and 1972, tin accounted for 23.1% and 22.9% respectively of Malaysia's total export values. See Department of Statistics, Preliminary Figures of External Trade for December 1972, p.12 and March 1973, pp.12-13.
  10. There is a slight discrepancy between the figures given in the Second Malaysia Plan (p.170) and those provided by the 1967 Census of Mining Industries. The latter gave the total employment in mining industries for 1967 as 61,063 of which 55,134 were engaged in tin mining of one form or another. See Department of Statistics, Census of Mining Industries in West Malaysia, 1967.

point dropped to 66% as against 24.8% Malays and 8.4% Indians (Table 2.1).

The earliest tin mining activities in Malaysia were mainly carried out by the Malays before the arrival of the British. The Chinese began tin mining on a small-scale in approximately 1824. Their participation in the industry increased with the discovery of tin ore in Perak and Selangor, until eventually they came to control most of the tin mines in these two states. In the beginning, the Europeans took little part in tin mining. Their relative share in the industry began to increase only since the turn of the century, with the introduction of gravel-pump and bucket-dredge mining. Despite some initial failures, the European tin-mining sector continued to exist and expand, so that by 1910 22% of the total tin output of the Federated Malay States was produced by European mines (Lim, 1967:50).

The Chinese had nearly full control of the tin mining industry in the beginning. In the last three decades of the 19th century, nearly all the tin produced in the country was mined by the Chinese. By 1910 they still produced 78% of the total output. Since then the Chinese sector of the industry began to decline slowly. By 1920 the percentage of the Chinese sector was reduced to 64%, and by 1929, only 49% (Table 2.3). While the output of the Chinese mines was declining, that of the Europeans was on the increase. This pattern persisted until 1961, when the European sector

Table 2.3: Tin Production - by European and Chinese  
Mines, 1910-29  
(By percentage)

Year	European Sector	Chinese Sector	Year	European Sector	Chinese Sector
1910	22	78	1920	36	64
1911	23	77	1921	39	61
1912	20	80	1922	38	62
1913	26	74	1923	44	56
1914	24	76	1924	45	55
1915	28	72	1925	44	56
1916	32	68	1926	44	56
1917	29	71	1927	41	59
1918	32	68	1928	49	51
1919	32	68	1929	51	49

Source: Lim Chong Yah, Economic Development of Modern Malaya,  
p.54.

produced as many as 65% of the total output (Table 2.4). By 1963, the production of European sector dropped slightly, but it still constituted 60% of the total output. Subsequent production figures according to racial origin are not available. But there is no reason to believe that the predominant position of the European mines should have changed. In 1967, in terms of value of minerals produced, more than 50% of it was accounted for by foreign companies.<sup>11</sup>

The relative and absolute decline of the Chinese sector of the tin mining industry was, to a large extent, the result of technological changes in mining methods introduced at the turn of the century, namely, the adoption of dredges. The dredging method was highly capital intensive and required relatively less labour. The rapid growth of the dredging sector made it difficult for the Chinese miners to compete for mining land with European mining entrepreneurs. Another important factor resulting in the decline of the Chinese tin mining sector was the exhaustion of known mining land suitable for non-dredge mining (Lim, 1967:55).

The majority of Chinese mines are small-scale operations owned by a large number of individual entrepreneurs. In 1967, of the total of 1,389 mines owned by Malaysians (of whom the bulk of them were Chinese), as many as 968 were under individual proprietorship and partnership, only less

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11. Department of Statistics, Census of Mining Industries in West Malaysia, 1967, p.53.



Table 2.4: European share of Malayan tin  
production, 1946 - 61.

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Year	Per Cent.
1946	38
1947	60
1948	58
1949	60
1956	60
1957	57
1958	61
1959	60
1960	64
1961	65

Source: Lim Chong Yah, op.cit.p.67.

than one third were private and public limited companies.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, in terms of methods of mining, most of the Chinese mines belong to the following categories: gravel-pumping, hydraulicing, open-casting, underground and dulang washing. This is in sharp contrast with European mines, the majority of which are limited companies employing dredges.

In terms of share capital in mining, there is no doubt that foreign companies occupy a pre-eminent position. In 1970 foreign interests accounted for 72.4% of the total share capital of limited companies in mining and quarrying. The share of the Chinese was only 16.8%. Malay and Indian ownership was insignificant, amounting to 0.7% and 0.4% respectively (Table 2.2). But the strength of the Chinese in mining lies in small-scale operations under individual proprietorship and partnership. Together these small operations produce 40% of the total output. It is thus clear that even though the industry is foreign-dominated, the Chinese have the largest share vis-a-vis the Malays and the Indians.

#### The Chinese in Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing

In contrast with commerce, manufacturing and mining - where the Chinese have a dominant position over the Malays - the Chinese have never been very active in agriculture,

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12. Department of Statistics, Census of Mining Industries, p.10.

forestry and fishing, which provide employment for nearly one half of the population. The 1957 Census shows that of the total of 1,245,000 persons gainfully employed in agricultural sector, the Chinese constituted only 310,000, approximately 25%, as against 60% Malays.<sup>13</sup> In 1970, as can be seen from Table 2.1, the Chinese accounted for only 21.4% of the total employment in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. The Malays, on the other hand, constituted as many as 67.6%.

It is clear from these figures that employment in the agricultural sector is dominated by the Malays.<sup>14</sup> However, what is less obvious is that many agricultural Malays are to be found in traditional low productivity activities. In terms of ownership of assets in modern agriculture, Malay share in the corporate sector was only 0.3% in 1970. But their share in the non-corporate sector amounted to 47.1%. The Chinese share in the corporate and non-corporate sectors was 25.9% and 32.8% respectively (Table 2.5).

It must be noted that Chinese participation in the agricultural economy is largely concentrated on rubber

13. 1957 Population Census, Report No.14, Table 11.

14. In 1967-68, 65% of the Malay working population were engaged in agricultural occupations. The corresponding figures for Chinese and Indians were 30.1% and 47.0% respectively. This shows that among the three local communities, the Chinese are least engaged in agricultural pursuits. See Choudhry (1970:100).

Table 2.5: Ownership of Assets in modern agriculture and industry, West Malaysia 1970.

Ownership	Modern agriculture <sup>+</sup> (planted acreage)				Industry <sup>*</sup> (fixed assets)			
	Corporate Sector	%	'000	Non-corporate sector	Corporate Sector	%	\$ Millions	Non-corporate sector
Malaysians	515.0	29.2	697.6	94.1	559.7	42.8	167.2	97.6
Malay	5.0	0.3	349.3	47.1	11.2	0.9	3.9	2.3
Chinese	457.0	25.9	243.3	32.8	342.3	26.2	158.0	92.2
Indian	4.9	0.3	74.8	10.1	1.5	0.1	3.9	2.3
Others	48.1	2.7	13.2	1.8	187.2	14.3	1.4	0.8
Government <sup>++</sup>	-	-	17.0	2.3	17.5	1.3	-	-
Non-Malaysians	1,249.6	70.8	44.0	5.9	747.3	57.2	4.1	2.4
Total	1,764.6	100	741.6	100	1,307.0	100	171.3	100
% of Total	-	70.4	-	29.6	-	87.4	-	12.6

+ Covers estate acreage; ownership is in terms of total planted acreage.

\* Industry covers manufacturing, construction and mining; ownership is in terms of fixed assets excluding an unallocatable M\$25.2m.

++ Government ownership of 17,000 acres in modern agriculture included in non-corporate sector; its ownership of M\$17.5 million of fixed assets in industry is included under the corporate sector.

Source: Mid-term Review of Second Malaysia Plan.

industry and to a smaller extent other agricultural products requiring substantial processing such as palm oil and coconut. The 1957 figure shows that about two-thirds of the Chinese employed in agriculture were engaged in rubber industry. Chinese participation in market-gardening (vegetable growing) is also remarkable. In 1957, they accounted for more than 80% of the total of 46,000 engaged in market-gardening. However, in the rice cultivation, fishing and other miscellaneous agricultural pursuits, Chinese role is relatively unimportant. In such instances it is the Malays who predominate.<sup>15</sup>

#### The Chinese in the Rubber Industry

Rubber is the most important agricultural produce as well as the largest export industry of Malaysia. In 1971 the total planted area under rubber was 4,246,000 acres, of which 1,561,000 acres were under estates (holdings of 100 acres and above) and 2,685,000 acres under small-holdings.

The Chinese have a fairly big share in the rubber industry, both in terms of ownership and employment. The 1953 statistics (Table 2.6) shows that 22.8% of the estates and 40.1% of the small-holdings were owned by Chinese. Taking the rubber estates and small-holdings together, the Chinese share of the planted acreage was about 30%, as against 42% Europeans and 19% Malays. If one takes Asian

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15. Cf. 1957 Population Census, Report No.14, Table 11.

Table 2.6: Ethnic ownership of rubber estates and small-holdings, 1953 (percentage distribution)

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Race	Estate	Small-holding	Estate and Small-holding	
			All Races	Asian only
European	69.6	-	41.6	-
Chinese	22.8	40.1	29.7	50.9
Malay	0.6	47.3	19.4	33.3
Indian	5.6	8.7	6.8	11.7
Others	1.4	5.0*	2.4	4.1
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total '000 acres	2,029.7	1,369.8	3,399.5	1,987.1

\* includes some medium small-holdings owned by Europeans.

Source: Lim Chong Yah, op.cit. p.117.

ownership only, the Chinese accounted for one half, the Malays one third and the Indians owned the bulk of the remainder.

The 1953 figure shows clearly the predominant position of the Europeans in rubber estates. This situation persisted even though the total planted acreage owned by Europeans have declined and those of the Asian sector have increased steadily. By 1966 the Europeans still owned 55.8% of the total estates. By 1970 foreign control of the rubber estates was still evident. Of the total planted estate acreage foreigners owned slightly more than 50%.<sup>16</sup> The bulk of the remainder was owned by the Chinese. The Malay ownership of estates is insignificant. Of the rubber small-holdings (slightly over 2 million acres in 1970), Malays and non-Malays shared about equally in ownership. Taking the rubber estates and small-holdings together (4.2 million acres in 1970), the Malays owned 37%, the non-Malays 42% and the foreigners 21% (Second Malaysia Plan:39-40).

In terms of the size of the estates, those owned by the Chinese are generally smaller than the European-owned. This is clearly shown by the 1971 statistics on estate ownership. Even though the Chinese and other Malaysians accounted for only 44% of the total planted estate acreage,

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16. At least three factors have contributed to the decline of European rubber acreage both absolutely and relatively. First, during the Japanese Occupation period, thousands of acres of European rubber estates were destroyed. Secondly, there was the constant subdivision of rubber estates into small holdings during and after the War and finally, some European estates shifted to oil-palm cultivation. See Lim (1967:112).

as against 56% owned by European and other foreign interests, they owned as many as 1,480 estates out of a total of 2,014. Moreover, they accounted for only 62 estates with 2,000 acres and above, while the corresponding figure for foreign companies was as many as 153 (Rubber Statistical Handbook, 1971:14 & 30).

The main reason for the smaller size of Chinese estates in comparison with the European ones lies in the difference in capital supply and economic organization of both communities. The Europeans could mobilize much more capital and technical know-how to build up and maintain large-scale estate operations through their agency houses, secretarial firms and joint-stock companies. The Chinese had no such advantages. The majority of them operated under individual proprietorship and partnership with relatively smaller capital<sup>17</sup> and could only operate and maintain smaller scale estates (Lim, 1967:116).

It is impossible to estimate the total number of Chinese and Malays engaged in rubber small holdings. However, it is reasonable to believe that a substantial proportion of the working population of both communities are involved in small holdings.

In terms of estate labour, Table 2.7 should provide a rough guide.

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17. In 1971, nearly half of the estates owned by Chinese and other Malaysians were under partnership and only 60 out of a total of 1,480 were public companies. See Rubber Statistical Handbook (1971:12).



Table 2.7: Labour employed on rubber estates by ethnic groups, West Malaysia, (selected years).

Year	Chinese	Malay	Indian	Other	Total '000
1966	77.2	60.0	111.8	0.5	249.5
1968	64.0	47.2	95.1	0.4	206.7
1969	65.0	51.5	98.2	0.4	215.1
1970	69.7	62.4	93.8	0.5	226.4
1971	54.4	63.8	79.8	0.7	198.7

Source: Rubber Statistical Handbook, Malaysia, 1966, 1968, 1969, 1970 and 1971.

It is evident that all the three communities are substantially involved in estate employment. The trend seems to be that while the labour force of Chinese and Indians is declining, that of the Malays is on the increase.

#### The Chinese in other Industries

Another industry where the Chinese have a significant control in terms of labour force and ownership is construction. In 1970 the Chinese share in the labour force of the industry was 72.1% as compared to 21.7% Malays. In terms of share capital of limited companies in the construction sector, the Chinese owned 52.8%. In transport and communications, the number of Chinese employed is also substantial, even though the number of Malays is even greater. In 1970 the Chinese share of the total employment in this sector was 39.6% as compared to the Malay share of 42.6%. Banking and insurance is another area in which the Chinese play an important role. Even though in terms of ownership, a large proportion of the share capital is in the hands of foreigners (52.2% in 1970), the Chinese are the most important local group in banking and insurance. Among the local communities, they have the largest share in the share capital (24.3% in 1970). Moreover, in terms of employment, the Chinese constitute a very significant number.

### Ownership and Control of Malaysian Economy

Thus far we have indicated the participation of the Chinese in Malaysia's major industries. In terms of employment there is little doubt that they occupy a pre-dominant position. This is particularly so in mining, commerce and manufacturing.<sup>18</sup> However, in terms of ownership and control, the Chinese are far from dominating Malaysia's economy. As can be seen from Table 2.2, it is the foreigners, mainly Europeans, who have the largest share in the share capital of limited companies, amounting to 60.7% of the total as against 22.5% by the Chinese. The Malay share amounts to only 1.9%.

Moreover, in terms of planted acreage, foreigners own 71% of the corporate sector of modern agriculture; in industry, their share is 57% of the total fixed assets. The corresponding figures for the Chinese are 25.9% and 26.2% respectively, and for the Malays, 0.3% and 0.9% respectively (Table 2.5). If these figures are any indications then it is clear that important sectors of the Malaysian economy are largely controlled by the foreigners.

The Chinese role is only secondary vis-a-vis the foreigners. But among the local communities, they dominate many vital sectors of the economy. The Chinese economic

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18. Under the New Economic Policy introduced in 1971 which among others favours the Malays in commerce and industry, it is believed that the relative position of the Chinese might have declined, even though the general picture is still one of Chinese preponderance, especially in the managerial and entrepreneurial ranks.

position has been succinctly summed up by Puthucheary (1960:133):

Chinese capitalists, taken together, control a sizeable part of the economy. In most industries they are subsidiary to European capitalists. In capitalist agriculture their share is small. This is also true of export-import trade. They have a larger share of the mining industry. In minor industries such as manufacture, transport and entertainment they hold the dominant position. Chinese capitalists are by far the most important local capitalists.

The very substantial economic strength of the Europeans has been emphasized by Puthucheary. Much of Malaysia's economy, according to him, was and still is controlled by big European companies. Of these the merchant and managing-agency firms are by far the most important.

These (merchant and managing-agency firms) have the strongest claim to being regarded as typical of Malayan enterprise. Several of them were originally merchant houses which in the later years of the nineteenth century dominated the commercial life of Singapore and later nursed the rubber industry of Malaya. Others began their career as merchants in Great Britain or Europe. A few started as planters and went into merchanting later on. These houses of which there are about a dozen of importance, link together the agricultural and mining activities of the mainland with the commerce of Singapore, the technical expertise of the Midlands and North Britain, and the finance of London .... The managing-agency system is in essence a method of industrial and commercial organization designed to reduce the risk of foreign investment in countries where business expertise and managerial skill are scarce...

(Allen & Donnithorne, 1954:52).

The main task of the managing-agent is, therefore, the administration and sale of the produce (in the case of a rubber estate, for example) of a company. However, the functions of merchant and managing agents are frequently, though not necessarily always, carried out by the same firm. Firms that combine merchanting and managing functions are generally referred to as the agency houses.

As has been indicated in 'Introduction' of this study, these European agency houses perform a wide range of economic activities and control a considerable part of Malaysia's economy. They specialize in imports and exports especially as selling or buying agents for foreign manufacturers. They are also managing-agents for many foreign enterprises. In addition, they control a good part of tin mines and rubber estates. In mining, for example, three mining agencies - the Anglo-Oriental, Neill and Bell, and Osborne and Chappel - together owned and controlled 74 out of the 108 dredges in 1954 (Lim, 1967:70 and Puthuchear, 1960:85). In rubber industry, two readily available examples are Harrisons & Crosfield and Guthries.

While the Chinese do not control Malaysia's economy, it is beyond any doubt that the vast majority of the local capitalists are Chinese. In terms of incomes, the Chinese are comparatively better off than the Malays and Indians. Figures show that the mean household income for the Chinese is M\$387, as against M\$179 for the Malays and M\$310 for the Indians. The median household incomes are given at M\$271,

M\$122 and M\$196 respectively (Table 2.8). The percentage pattern of incomes shows more clearly the relative position of the three communities in regard to incomes.<sup>19</sup> The Chinese spread of income is more even and their percentage in the higher income groups is higher than that of the Malays, who predominate in the lowest categories. The Indians are slightly better off than the Malays.

Chinese predominance in commercial life and the fact that many of the local capitalists and millionaires are Chinese have created some difficulties in race relations. In the first place, apart from a handful of educated elite, few people in Malaysia today realize that the bulk of the national economy is controlled by foreign companies. Many people still firmly believe that it is the Chinese who really control Malaysia's economy. This belief is particularly prevalent among the ordinary Malays, who often envy, and not infrequently even feel resentful towards, the success of the Chinese in a country the Malays regard as their own. There are even some Malays who believe that their economic backwardness is the direct outcome of Chinese exploitation in the form of middlemen and creditors. All this has affected their attitude unfavourably towards the Chinese.

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19. There are no reliable recent data on the distribution of national income by ethnic group. Estimates made in 1957 showed that the Chinese received 54% of the total national income of M\$3,675 million, compared to only 30% for the Malays and 13% for the Indians. The per capita income of Chinese, Malays and Indians were M\$848, M\$359, M\$691 respectively. See Silcock and Fisk (1963:3).

Table 2.8: Income distribution of households by percentage & race, West Malaysia 1970

Income <sup>+</sup> range per month	Malay	Chinese	Indian	other	Total
\$1 - 99	22.9	2.6	1.3	0.2	27.1
\$100 - 199	19.1	7.8	4.4	0.1	31.4
\$200 - 399	10.4	11.9	3.5	0.1	25.9
\$400 - 699	3.0	5.3	1.2	0.1	9.6
\$700 - 1,499	1.1	2.9	0.6	0.1	4.7
\$1,500 - 2,999	0.2	0.7	0.1	0.1	1.1
\$3,000 and above	*	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.3
Total	56.7	31.3	11.2	0.8	100.0
Mean household income Monthly \$	178.7	387.4	310.4	950.0	268.7
Median household income Monthly \$	122.3	271.1	195.5	324.2	168.6

+Income includes cash income, imputed income for earnings in kind plus transfer receipts.

\*The percentage is negligible in relation to the total.

Source: Mid-term Review of the Second Malaysia Plan 1971-75.

As long as this Chinese economic 'myth' persists, it is unlikely that the conflict stemming from it will disappear.

The second point concerns Chinese reaction against Malay belief in the Chinese economic 'myth'. The Chinese firmly believe that their better economic position vis-a-vis the Malays is the natural outcome of their industry, thrift and their flexibility to modern ways, and that Malay backwardness is the result of their laziness, thriftlessness and conservatism. (Silcock, 1965:182-3). They feel strongly that whatever economic position that they have today is through sheer hard work rather than exploitation. They feel they deserve every bit of their success.

Thus, there seem to be some elements of opposition between the two positions and this has created a certain amount of prejudice, uncasiness and friction between the two peoples.

Thirdly, the informal nature of Chinese business organizations together with their emphasis on familism tends to exclude Malays and other non-Chinese. This is particularly true of small-scale enterprises which are the most characteristic of Chinese business. The ethnocentric nature of the Chinese and their prejudice against the Malays serve further to reinforce the exclusion. To some extent this has evoked resentment among the Malays who feel that the Chinese are unduly clannish.



Finally, economic imbalance between the Malays and the Chinese has been exploited and made a political issue by some unscrupulous politicians. As a result, the difference between the Malays and Chinese in terms of income and wealth is so much exaggerated that conflict tends to focus on this issue only. Even many of the government policies and corrective measures tend to concentrate on economic differences between ethnic groups, rather than between the poor and the rich. These policies which are based on racial rather than economic criteria may serve to please the Malays who benefit from them, but they have alienated those non-Malays who occupy similar or even lower socio-economic strata as the poor Malays.

#### Measures to Correct Economic Imbalance.

Realizing the economic imbalance between the Chinese and the Malays, various attempts have been made by the government to uplift the socio-economic position of the Malays so as to narrow the racial economic gap. The most important measures taken are in the form of Malay Special Rights and more recently the New Economic Policy incorporated in the Second Malaysia Plan (1971-5).

The Malay Special Rights date back to the colonial era. The first laws giving the Malay community special rights were those concerning Malay Land Reservation. These laws were essentially the product of colonial policies designed to promote economic development, while at the same time protecting the Malays from the disruptive effects of

economic development resulting from the influx of European enterprises as well as vast numbers of Chinese and Indian immigrants.

Under these laws, large areas of land were designated as 'Malay Reservations'. Only Malays were entitled to own or lease land in these special areas. The laws also prohibited the Malay from transferring or leasing his land to a non-Malay under any circumstances. In other words, non-Malays were not only prevented from holding mortgages on any land in the reservations, but they were also prohibited from seizing the land in discharge of debts.<sup>20</sup>

Apart from the Land Reservation, the Malays were also accorded privileges in public services by the colonial administration. The Malay College at Kuala Kangsar was established in 1905 to train sons of aristocratic Malays for positions in the public service. The Malay Administrative Service, a junior service to the Malayan Civil Service, was specially created to provide employment opportunities exclusively for Malays who qualified for junior administrative positions in the government.

In the field of education, the Malays were given preferential government support. Only Malay education was provided free by the colonial government, in contrast

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20. The first Malay Reservation Enactment was made in the FMS in 1913. Similar legislations were enacted in Kelantan (1930), Kedah (1931), Perlis (1935), Johore (1936) and Trengganu (1941). There is no Malay reservation legislation in Penang. In Malacca, the Malacca Customary Rights Ordinance, which dates back to 1886, has a similar effect as the reservation legislation. See The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, *The Economic Development of Malaya* (Baltimore, 1955:311-313).

to Chinese or Indian vernacular education which was largely provided for by the respective communities or by the missionaries in the case of English education.

These Special Rights accorded to the Malays reflected the pro-Malay attitude of the colonial authorities. But in no way was the colonial policy genuinely designed to achieve economic uplift and social transformation of the Malay community. Indeed, the Special Rights were designed for the opposite objectives - to preserve the traditional patterns and structure of the Malay community and its peasant-based economy: the Malay Land Reservation was designed to preserve the traditional life style of the Malay peasants, while Special Rights in the public service and education were aimed at preserving the status of the Malay aristocratic class thus making them more effective junior partners in the colonial system (Means, 1972:36). Only in later years were these discriminatory policies considered to be appropriate measures to uplift the economic backwardness of the Malay community.

With Malaya's independence in 1957, the Malay Special Rights were given specific constitutional sanction and protection, contained in Articles 89 and 153: the former Article concerns land reservations and the latter deals with the reservation of quotas in respect of public service appointments, educational facilities and business licenses. Article 153 of the Constitution authorizes the Yang Di

Pertuan Agong (the Paramount Ruler) 'to safeguard the special position of the Malays' in the public service, scholarships and training privileges, and the issuance of licenses for the operation of any trade or business. Article 89 sanctions the system of Malay Land Reservations and permits the State Legislatures to increase the area of the Reservations.<sup>21</sup>

In short, there are four main areas of special rights which the Malays have over and above other communities. These are land reservations, preferential quotas for public service appointments, educational special rights and preferential quotas for business permits and licenses. All these aim at helping the Malays achieve economic advancement. Nonetheless, they are forms of discrimination based on ethnicity and cannot avoid affecting the Chinese and other non-Malays in one way or another. In the public service, for instance, the job opportunities open to the Chinese are restricted as a result of the quota system in favour of Malays: the administrative elite of the public service - the Malayan Civil Service - maintains a 4 to 1 recruitment ratio in favour of Malays; the External Affairs Service, the Judicial and Legal Services and the Customs Service all maintain a Malay and non-Malay ratio of 3 to 1.

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21. The Constitution also provides that when a new area is added to Malay reservations, at least an equal area should be made available for general alienation and that the new area should not include any land already owned by non-Malays. To allay the fears of the non-Malays, Article 153 gives an assurance that 'the legitimate interests of other communities' would be safeguarded, even though no guidance is provided as to what these 'legitimate interests' are. Article 153 further assures that no person shall be deprived of any public office already held by him or of any privilege or license already enjoyed or held by him solely for the purpose of reservations for Malays.

In other Special Rights areas too, the Chinese are affected. Malay Land Reservations mean that there is less land available for the Chinese. Preferential quotas in scholarships result in some bright but needy Chinese students being deprived of an opportunity to further their studies. Quotas in business permits and licenses make it more difficult for the Chinese to start a business than the Malays.

The New Economic Policy, upon which the Second Malaysia Plan is based, is designed to promote the overriding objective of 'national unity'. To achieve this, two main objectives are set forth under the Policy: first, the eradication of poverty among all Malaysians, irrespective of race; and second, the restructuring of Malaysian society 'in order to correct the racial economic imbalance' (Second Malaysia Plan:1).

These two objectives - which are in many respects inter-dependent and mutually reinforcing - are to be pursued in the context of an expanding economy. This in turn means that increases in the Gross National Product are major means by which the two objectives are to be achieved.<sup>22</sup> In particular, special attention will be paid to the Malay community in an attempt to achieve economic balance and to eradicate the identification of race with economic activity.

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22. The Second Plan aims at a 6.5% GNP growth annually. This means per capita income will grow at 3.7% annually, increasing from M\$1,080 in 1970 to M\$1,300 in 1975. In employment, the Plan calls for the creation of more than 119,000 new jobs per year during 1971-75, and the maintenance of unemployment rate of no more than 7.3%. See Second Malaysia Plan, pp.51 & 101.

In the rural sector of the economy where the Malays predominate, modern techniques will be introduced increasingly to 'transform the rural sector into a genuine dynamic force for agricultural and economic development'. More new land will be opened up for cultivation with modern techniques.<sup>23</sup>

To 'speed up the exposure of rural inhabitants, particularly Malays and other indigenous people, to the influences of an urban environment', efforts will be made to foster the development of modern industries in rural areas and the migration of rural Malays to urban areas. Projects to increase Malay participation in modern industrial activities include preferential treatment in business premises, finance, technical and marketing advice, training etc. Quota system in employment will be continued and extended to ensure that the employment pattern in business enterprises reflects the multi-racial composition of the population. Furthermore, the various government agencies specially set up to aid Malays will provide financial and technical assistance as well as to set up new industries for the participation of the Malays.<sup>24</sup>

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23. The target of the Plan is to develop over a million acres of land - more than twice the acreage under the previous plan. Since the emphasis is on rural development, the Malays will be the primary beneficiaries under the land development programmes.

24. These agencies are Majlis Amanah Rakyat (Council of Trustees for Indigenous People), Perbadanan Nasional Berhad (National Trading Corporation - PERNAS), Urban Development Authority (UDA), State Economic Development Corporations (SEDC's) and Malaysian Industrial Development Finance (MIDF). Cf. Second Malaysia Plan, p.45.

The government also realizes the importance of education as a major component in the development process. Programmes of improvement of rural schools are introduced to raise the quality of education. Greater attention will also be given to ensure that the Malays have greater access to higher education facilities especially in the sciences and other disciplines 'essential for effective participation in modern activities' (Second Malaysia Plan:44).

All these programmes and measures are in effect pro-Malay and designed to correct the economic imbalance that exists between the Malays and the non Malays, and finally to achieve national unity. The government has stated clearly its target of creating an effective Malay entrepreneurial class. That is to say, within two decades there should be at least 30% Malay participation in terms of ownership and management in all categories of commercial and industrial activities (Second Malaysia Plan: 158-9).

With regard to special rights and other preferential policies, the Chinese reaction can be divided into at least three groups. The more moderate Chinese agree that Malays are economically backward and that they should be given special privileges until such time as they are capable of competing with other communities without any help. By contrast, the more extreme Chinese denounce the whole idea of special privileges as contrary to principles of democracy and equality. Both groups are, however, more concerned with the future of the special privileges and are agreed that they

should not be made on a permanent basis (Ratnam, 1965:114-7). Between these two groups, there is a small group with an indifferent and 'couldn't care less' attitude. Members of this group feel that the Special Rights is a problem between the government and the Malays. It is none of their concern.<sup>25</sup>

Effects of Special Rights and the New Economic Policy.

We are concerned here only with how the Special Rights and the New Economic Policy have affected the Chinese community. To begin with, it should be noted that the discriminatory policies in favour of the Malay community have at no time appeared to be blatantly anti-Chinese. They have always been couched in languages in such a way as to allay Chinese fears. Article 153 on Malay Special Rights is careful to guarantee the Chinese that their 'legitimate interests' would be safeguarded by the Yang Di Pertuan Agong and that no one would be deprived of any privilege as a result of the special rights provisions. With respect to the New Economic Policy, the government gives assurances that 'no particular group will experience any loss or feel any sense of deprivation' in the implementation of the Policy (Second Malaysia Plan:1). The Prime Minister assured, "The rights, properties and privileges now belonging to whichever groups

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25. In a study of communalism among the Chinese, Hong (1971:98) reported that among his informants (a total of ninety), 51% agreed that the Malays should be given special rights, 24% were 'jealous' and 'dissatisfied', 20% were indifferent while only 5% were against such rights.



or individuals will not be taken and be given to others. What is envisaged by the government is that the newly created opportunities will be distributed in a just and equitable manner". (Malaysian Digest, July 15, 1971).

Yet the government measures mentioned above are clearly discriminating against the Chinese and are regarded as such by the latter. Thus far, special rights and other preferential policies have definitely affected some Chinese individuals unfavourably, even though the Chinese community as a whole has not been seriously disturbed economically. The Malaysian Chinese, unlike the Chinese in many other Southeast Asian countries, are a significant minority. As immigrants, there are bound to be some discrimination against them in favour of the indigenous. But cases of economic persecution like those occurred in Indonesia and the Philippines are not heard of. By and large, the Chinese in Malaysia are in no way an oppressed minority.

Because of their wealth and shrewdness, Chinese businessmen have even been able to circumvent the special rights and other government restrictions. The most common way to comply with government regulations is to take on Malays as business partners and make them 'directors' of the companies or firms. Very often, these Malay 'directors' are a show-piece who are paid fixed monthly salaries but have little effective control over the companies they 'direct'.

Related to this is the 'Ali-Baba' business set-up. This results from the government's preferential policy for the Malays to obtain business licenses or permits. As it is relatively easier for the Malays to obtain business licenses, such as in transport, there is a tendency for the Chinese who own capital and technical know-how to go into partnership with them. The partnership in itself is perfectly legitimate - the Malays provide the license while the Chinese provide the capital. But what normally happens is that once the partnership has been set up, the Malay partners for one reason or another are content to receive a fixed sum for the licenses they obtain and leave the effective control and management of the business to the Chinese. Through this so-called 'Ali-Baba' business partnership - which is in actual fact an abuse of the Malay Privileges by the Malays themselves - the Chinese are able to operate in businesses largely reserved for the Malays.

Apart from the above arrangement, the Chinese are sometimes able to compensate for some of the discriminatory effects through bribery and other forms of payments, even though such payments increase their cost of doing business and are resented by them. There are even cases when the Chinese have been able to buy land under Malay Reservations from the Malays through corruption.<sup>26</sup> In short, over the years the Chinese have been able to get their way around most

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26. This happened at least in one district where the writer used to live.

of the government regulations, and consequently their relatively dominant economic position has not suffered badly.

It is still too early to assess the effects of the New Economic Policy on the Chinese community. One thing, however, is clear, and that is the advancement of Malays would mean that to some extent the Chinese would have to restrain their rate of progress and in many cases would even have to retreat from the position already reached. According to the Second Malaysia Plan, in terms of employment, it is projected that by 1990 the Malays would account for about 50% of the labour force in manufacturing, commerce and mining. This means that the Chinese, who dominate these three industries (accounting for more than 65% of the labour force in 1970) will have their share reduced to 40% by 1990.

In some respects the Special Rights appear to be a zero-sum game: the more is given to the Malays the less is available to the Chinese. The quota system in higher education to ensure more opportunities for the Malays, for example, has begun to affect the non-Malay communities, especially the Chinese. In 1970, the Chinese constituted 49.2% of the total higher education enrolment as compared to 39.7% Malays. The position by 1973 has been reversed: Malays accounted for 52.7% as against 38.8% Chinese.<sup>27</sup>

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27. Mid-term Review of the Second Malaysia Plan, cited in Dewan Masyarakat, January 15, 1974, p.21.

In 1975, of the total enrolment of the country's five universities, the Malays accounted for 58.5% as against 35.5% Chinese (New Straits Times, December 3, 1975).

This quota system to satisfy the Malays inevitably denies equal competitive opportunities to some deserving Chinese students. Many Chinese students resent the fact that Malays with minimum academic qualifications have been given higher education opportunities whereas with equal or better qualifications, they are denied these opportunities.

While no serious economic damage has yet been encountered by the Chinese community, these varied discriminatory measures have given rise to some unintended consequences. In the first place, many ambitious young Chinese have been alienated by what they consider to be 'unfair' and 'unwarranted' special rights. They feel apprehensive and resentful for the simple reason that as citizens, they are not entitled to all the privileges accruing from such a status. The majority of them therefore feel that they are only treated as second-class citizens, even though their citizenship is obtained on the basis of jus soli. This being the case, they are unprepared or even reluctant to identify themselves emotionally with the Malaysian nation.

Secondly, the effect of pro-Malay policies has been to sow fear, insecurity and a sense of frustration among the Chinese. This has in turn resulted in driving the Chinese further from integration with the Malays and encouraged them to look more and more to their own ethnic organizations and leaders. Unwittingly perhaps these policies have actually helped to draw the Chinese closer together.

In this chapter we have tried to show several things with regards to Chinese role in Malaysian economy: first, the relative economic position of the Chinese vis-a-vis other local communities and foreigners; second, the fact that Chinese do not control the Malaysian economy; third, the Malay Special Rights and the New Economic Policy and their effects on the Chinese; and finally how Chinese predominance in the economy has affected race relations.

Chinese economic activities and dominance, however, are not the only factors generating conflict among the two communities. Their participation in politics has also been seen as creating problems. It is on this subject that we would focus our attention in the next two chapters.

## CHAPTER 3

### CHINESE POLITICS IN MALAYSIA: THE PRE-WAR PERIOD

#### Introduction

Politics in Malaysia, like politics in many other plural societies, has always been a 'sensitive' and fascinating subject: sensitive because it has largely been intertwined with communal issues; fascinating because in sharp contrast with racially more homogeneous societies, many issues which do not normally constitute political problems in such societies assume political importance here.

Earlier we have noted how British colonialism had resulted in the growth of a plural society in Malaysia. We have also drawn attention to some structural features which had developed during the colonial period. Many of these structural features still persist today.

In the first place, Malaysia still remains an example of a plural society par excellence, in which the bumiputra - the sons of the soil - have a pre-eminent position in the politics, government and administration of the country. The Chinese, and the Indians to a smaller extent, on the other hand, have a relatively dominant control over the country's economic and commercial life. This division is important politically; nevertheless it constitutes but one aspect of the diversities and heterogeneities among the various communities.

Secondly, there is as usual, a complete lack of cultural homogeneity. The three major ethnic groups differ very sharply from one another in their languages, religions, customs and habits. These cultural differences, apart from constituting a serious problem to national integration, are politically significant in another sense. Certain cultural matters such as language, education and religion have constituted some of the most difficult and sensitive political issues (Ratnam, 1965:1).

It is important to note another difference - the regional variation in the racial composition of the population. Broadly speaking, the Malays are concentrated in the rural areas on the east coast and in the north, while the non-Malays are primarily found in the west coast and urban centres. This regional distribution of population to some extent quite effectively restricts social contact between the two groups. Of more importance, however, is the fact that the west coast is far more developed and urbanized and thus enjoys a far better standard of living than the east and the north. Communal jealousies are to some extent being generated by this discrepancy (Ratnam, 1965:2).

A further issue which has had a great impact on the political process of Malaysia is the question of the Special Rights accorded to the Malays by virtue of being the sons of the soil. These Special Rights, as mentioned in the previous chapter, date back from the British colonial rule. The Special Rights give the Malays certain concessions

and privileges in the field of civil service appointments, education, granting of licenses and reservation of land. They essentially preserve the political supremacy of the Malays. The Malays insist that as the bumiputra, their interests should be guarded through the Special Rights enshrined in the Constitution to help them catch up with the non-Malays. The non-Malays, on the other hand, while accepting the need to help the Malays, seek to ensure that the Special Rights should not be a permanent feature. Thus, there is a conflict between the Malay's traditional claims and the non-Malay's demands. And this conflict has, until 1971, become a salient political issue.<sup>1</sup>

It is only seen in the context of this general background of the communal framework that Chinese politics is more meaningful. As noted at the very beginning of this chapter, politics in the Malaysian plural society is fascinating. This is taken to imply that the politics of the Chinese, who account for more than a third of the total population, is fascinating too. Indeed, Chinese politics in Malaysia has been a subject of almost international interest, particularly so during the past two decades. This may be explained in terms of the fact that the Malayan Communist Party consisted largely of Chinese; that it was Chinese politics in Singapore (part of Malaysia from 1963 to 1965) that produced the phenomenon of Lee Kuan Yew; and

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1. In 1971, a Parliamentary Amendment banned the public discussion of the question of the special position of the Malays.



most recently that the May 1969 communal disturbance in Kuala Lumpur is widely thought to have been an effort to stem a Chinese challenge to Malay supremacy (Wang, 1970:1).

There is little doubt that the Chinese in Malaysia, in sharp contrast with their counterparts in such countries as Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines, have been more actively involved in the politics of their country of adoption since the beginning of the British rule.<sup>2</sup> As a matter of fact, it was the dispute between two rival Chinese secret societies (two factions of tin-miners) which aided British intervention and occupation of the Malay states. During the Japanese Occupation, it was the Chinese who formed the bulk of the anti-Japanese resistance group. The subsequent history of Malaysia saw Chinese involvement in the Malayan Union of 1946 and the Federal Agreement of 1948. The Communist Revolt (1948-1960) was organized by a communist group consisting largely of Chinese. The Malayan Independence movement was actively participated in by the Chinese. Finally, in the contemporary era, the Chinese are more and more active in party politics - participating in both the nation's ruling party as well as the opposition parties. In short, the Chinese have always been aware of the importance of power and they are certainly more politically alert and conscious than has been assumed by many western observers.

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2. In countries like Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines, the governments are relatively free of local Chinese.

In common with the Chinese in other Southeast Asian countries, the Chinese in Malaysia fall broadly into three distinctive groups of political orientations. The first group (Group A) includes people who maintain contact with China's politics, either directly or indirectly, and is always prepared to identify with China's destiny. The second group (Group B), which includes the majority of the Chinese, is more concerned with the politics of their own overseas community. It is concerned with the low-posture and indirect politics of trade and community associations. This group is modest in its aims and frequently appears to be non-political. The third group (Group C) consists largely of local-born Chinese - the babas, the Malaysian nationalists and others. It is Malaysia-oriented and focuses its attention on local politics.<sup>3</sup>

It should be noted that these divisions are by no means rigid and the lines between the three groups are often difficult to draw. There have always been instances of mobility from one group to another. For example, a Group A Chinese may become disillusioned with his political conviction and join Group B or even Group C or vice versa. There are also those 'marginal men' who are not certain which group they belong to, just as there are some who possess the key attitudes of one group but would pretend that they belong to another. Finally, there exist also a few individuals who reject all the three groups (Wang, 1970:6). It is also important to note that each of these three groups is not absolutely homogeneous. All three are divided among themselves by political ideology and party affiliations.

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3. For a thorough discussion of the three groups, see Wang (1970:1-30).

Before we proceed further, a number of qualifications are in order. In the first place, as has been discussed in chapter 1, the Chinese are heterogeneous. There are many lines of divisions in the community: dialect separateness, different educational background, differences in political affiliations, and before the war, the division between the China-born and the local-born. All these divisions have been important at one time or another and in one way or another, in affecting the political ideas and attitudes of the Malaysian Chinese (Wang, 1970:3-4).

Secondly, before the war, in the beginning of their settlement in particular, the Chinese were generally apathetic towards Malaysian politics. This was partly explained in terms of their dividedness itself. Other factors such as the greater attractiveness of the politics in China, the traditional Chinese political philosophy which they brought with them and the general agreeableness of the British government to their thoughts and customs, certainly contributed. The most important reason, however, lay in the nature of their immigration. The Chinese had originally come to Malaysia for the purpose of earning a livelihood and looking for wealth, and the majority of them were transient sojourners during the period, especially before 1900 (Soh, 1960:35). Being largely transient in nature and economic in motivations, it is understandable that there was little incentive for them to engage actively in the political developments of their host country.

A third qualification relates to the prevailing misconception that the Chinese are non-political; and that when they do engage in politics, they do so in a secretive and inscrutable way. These views, as pointed out by Wang (1970:1), are anachronistic and misleading because they are based on the concept of politics in the modern democratic tradition. Chinese, Malay and colonial political systems have been in varying degrees, authoritarian, and the political life of the Chinese should be seen in that context.

With these qualifications, we are now in a position to consider pre-war Chinese politics.

#### The Secret Societies

The origin of Chinese secret societies in Malaysia can be traced to the Triad Society in China, otherwise known as the Hung League (洪家) or the Heaven and Earth Society (天地會). The Triad Society was originally a quasi-religious cult, with the virtuous aim 'Obey Heaven and Act Righteously' (順天行道). In the 18th century, however, the Society became involved in revolutionary movements. Its main aim was to 'overthrow the Ch'ing and restore the Ming' (反清復明). That is to say, the organization directed at restoring the native Chinese Ming dynasty by attempting to drive away the foreign Manchu dynasty which had overthrown the former in 1644.<sup>4</sup>

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4. For a traditional history of the secret societies, see Comber (1956, 1959) and Blythe (1969).

In Malaysia, the secret societies were very powerful organizations in the nineteenth century. Since their members were confined largely to the Chinese, it was not surprising that these organizations were mainly concentrated in the Chinese dominated Straits Settlements of Penang, Malacca and Singapore. Later, however, their activities and influence spread to the Malay states. In the Malayan setting, the patriotic motive of the secret societies - to overthrow the foreign Manchus - could find little expression. Their activities were mainly of a freemasonry nature with mutual aid and brotherly love as some of their main objectives. Later, they gradually degenerated into criminal organizations with constant faction fights and riots.

The role and usefulness of the secret societies in the early days of Chinese settlement could hardly be disputed. The majority of the Chinese immigrated to Malaya as individuals and in the new land they had to find some form of association for their mutual benefit. In the absence of other forms of associations, the secret societies therefore provided the institutional framework of the social and economic order within which they lived, and were the means by which, in the last resort, they were disciplined (Jackson, 1961:49).

During those early days, the government of the Straits Settlements impinged but little upon Chinese life. There were hardly any British officials who were equipped with the Chinese language and culture. As a result the Chinese

were largely left to their own devices. The influence of the secret societies thus became all-pervading. They settled disputes, provided mutual aid and protection to the new immigrants and their leaders even acted as buffers between Chinese community and the British officials. It is no exaggeration, therefore, to say that the Chinese community governed itself largely through the various secret societies in its early days in Malaya (up to 1870).

On the other hand, the evils of the secret societies should also be recognized. The system enabled the unscrupulous headmen, the employer, the professional tough, and the 'laukheh' (old hand) to dominate, intimidate and even exploit the often helpless 'sinkheh' (new-comer). Moreover, there were frequent clashes over the right to control lucrative 'rackets', mining areas, and sometimes as a result of jealousy over women. All these were constant sources of serious disorder causing grave concern on the part of the British colonial administrators.<sup>5</sup>

It is not proposed here to assess the relative merits and demerits of the Chinese secret societies. What we are more concerned with, however, is the political significance

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5. Throughout the first three quarters of the 19th century, there were a series of serious secret societies clashes in Singapore, Perak and Penang. In view of this, the Chinese Protectorate was established in 1877. It was staffed with officials well-equipped with the Chinese language and customs. Its major concern was the various aspects of the Chinese problems, particularly the problem posed by the secret societies. By 1890, with the enactment of the Societies Ordinance, the secret societies were outlawed. This by no means spelt the end of the secret societies which continued to exist illegally. However, the role of the societies as the dominant form of association among the Chinese was gradually replaced by the more open dialect, surname and benevolent associations.

of the secret societies. That is to say, our concern is specifically the role played by the secret societies in the making of Malayan history.

The early history of the Straits Settlements and the Malay states was largely characterized by fights and clashes between the rival Chinese secret societies. There were serious secret societies riots in Singapore in 1824, 1846, 1851 and 1854. In Perak, the faction fights occurred in 1862, and from 1872 to 1874. Fights also occurred in Penang in 1867 (Comber, 1956:150-1; Blythe, 1969). Of these fights, the one occurred in Perak which later came to be known as the Larut Wars (1862-74) had the most far-reaching effects in shaping the course of events, and therefore merits our special attention.

The two secret societies involved in the bloody Larut Wars in Perak were the Ghee Hin and the Hai San. It is generally believed that the former consisted largely of Cantonese and the latter were predominantly Hakkas.<sup>6</sup> Whatever their dialect origin it is important to note that the main cause of the clashes was over the ownership and control of mining land. The clash went on intermittently since 1862. Started in 1862 in Perak, it spread to Penang in 1867 and flared up afresh in Perak (Larut) from 1872 to 1874. It is significant to note that the wars were not purely Chinese fighting among themselves over the control of tin-mines; to a great extent, they were intermingled with the dispute over the succession to the Perak Sultanate. Rival Malay candidates for the throne appealed for the support of, and

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6. Blythe (1969:175-6) however, suggests that the mining labour of Larut was predominantly Hakka, and that the principal participants in the Larut Wars were, on both sides, Hakkas from different districts in China.

allied with one or the other Chinese factions, making the Larut Wars more complicated.

At the peak of the Larut Wars (end of 1873) a large number of men were mobilized and stockades built in many places around Larut by the rival factions. There was widespread concern among both the Chinese and European mercantile communities in the Straits Settlements over the safety of their capital. There was also a deep fear that the disturbance would spread to the Settlements if not stopped in time. Numerous pleas for intervention in the internal affairs of the Malay states were made by various sections of the population - particularly the mercantile community, both in the Malay states and in the Settlements - to the Governor. The Governor, Sir Harry Ord followed strictly the policy of non-interference. It was not until Sir Andrew Clarke took over office from Ord as Governor that the British Government decided to put a stop to the disturbances. The action was prompted by Raja Muda Abdullah, one of the claimants to the Perak throne, who wrote to Clarke at the end of 1873 suggesting that a new treaty be made with the British Government and asking for someone to be sent to Perak to show him a good system of government (Blythe, 1969:186; Emerson, 1964:119).

A joint meeting between the Governor and the headmen of the contending secret societies and the major Malay chiefs of Perak was called to resolve the civil disorder and the succession dispute in Perak. The meeting took place on the island of Pangkor in January 1874, resulting in the famous Treaty of Pangkor. Under the Treaty, the



Chinese secret societies agreed to disarm themselves and have their stockades destroyed, and both factions were to be at liberty to return to their mines in Larut. Of more importance, however, was the agreement of the new Sultan to accept a British Resident 'whose advice must be asked and acted upon on all questions other than those touching Malay religion and custom'. The Treaty was the first in a series of treaties that provided the basis for British indirect rule in the Malay states.<sup>7</sup>

Apart from providing an opportunity for British intervention in the Malay Peninsula, the secret societies were politically significant in another sense. Most of the Kapitan China in Malaya through whom the British ruled the Chinese, were themselves secret society leaders.<sup>8</sup> The appointment of these headmen as Kapitans was a recognition of their influence in the community. Some of these headmen, however, were even brought into the official administrative framework. For example, the Perak State Council, established in 1877, consisted among others of two Chinese members who were both headmen of the secret societies.<sup>9</sup>

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7. For a detailed account of the British intervention, see Parkinson (1960) and Cowan (1961).

8. Examples were Yap Tek Loy, Kapitan China of Selangor, who was headman of the Hai San. In Perak, Kapitan Ah Kwee and Kapitan Ah Yam were leaders of Hai San and Ghee Hin respectively.

9. The two were Kapitan Ah Kwee, headman of Hai San and Kapitan Ah Yam, headman of Ghee Hin. Cf. Blythe (1969:250).

The history of the Chinese secret societies in Malaya, had, at all times, manifested two striking features. The first of these was that the movement had been almost entirely confined to the Chinese. The second important feature was that the Chinese had been the principal victims (Blythe, 1950:14). Other communities were generally unharmed in the secret society disturbances. Vaughan, for example, reports that 'in all the riots between secret societies, or clans, or tribes, the government authorities and Europeans in general and all other classes have been scrupulously respected, and allowed to pass unharmed through streets filled with armed parties of opposing factions' (Vaughan, 1971:101).

The Larut Wars, however, appeared to be an exception to this general rule in that while the warring parties were largely Chinese, the Malay Chiefs and some Malay secret societies were involved in both factions. The Ghee Hin had the Malay secret societies, the White Flag as their allies while the Hai San had the Red Flag as their allies. Both factions were patronized by rival Malay Chiefs, the Ghee Hin and the White Flag by Raja Abdullah and the Hai San and the Red Flag by the Menteri of Larut, who supported Raja Ismail as the Sultan (Purcell, 1967:107-110). The Larut Wars, in a sense, marked the beginning of the Sino-Malay cooperation in politics. In both warring factions there were Sino -Malay coalitions and it is significant to note that the conflict was based upon political and economic interests rather than on race.

The people involved in the secret societies fights were mostly China-born Chinese. During those days they were regarded as sojourners who came to Malaysia to seek fortunes and would return to their homeland some day. The Chinese themselves viewed their situation in the same way. Considering themselves to be the 'Hua Ch'iau' (overseas Chinese), Malaysia was regarded at most as their second temporary home. The majority of them at this time still maintained strong ties with their homeland through having families and relatives there. Those few who had political consciousness almost invariably belonged to the China-oriented group who looked to China for inspiration. The bulk of these Chinese, however, had little interest in politics. They were more concerned with their livelihood in the foreign land. In view of this background, there is little reason to believe that the Chinese would be interested in local politics in the sense of active participation. It would, therefore, be wrong to assume that the secret societies which provided the British a rationalization to interfere with the internal affairs of the Malay states were interested in local politics as such. Their involvement was more out of necessity and expediency. The Chinese fought over the control of tin mines in Larut. They did not fight because of the disputed question of succession to the Malay throne. The succession dispute was mixed up in the faction feud because all parties concerned had in one way or another a stake in the tin mines.

The secret societies enforced their own system of law and order throughout their membership. They were believed to aim at establishing an imperium in imperio, and governing the Chinese community as they pleased, without outside interference. At no time were any of the secret society disturbances and riots directed against the local government. They had been entirely faction fights (Blythe, 1969:77).

The lack of interest in local politics on the part of the secret societies in particular and the majority of the Chinese in general could also be partly confirmed by the fact that even as late as the 1930's many Chinese were still not active in local politics. Part of the explanation for this, of course, lay in the transient nature of the Chinese. As we shall see later, only when the Chinese population became more settled did they begin to show a deeper concern over their local political rights. This did not occur until the 1940's.

#### The Kuomintang

With the official suppression in 1890, the secret societies were driven underground and their discipline loosened. Since then they have degenerated into gangs of thugs and their political power largely broken. But the suppression by no means spelt the end of Chinese political activities in Malaya. It only meant that one of the main currents of influence working on the pre-war Chinese community in Malaya was being controlled. For before long another important current of influence, the Kuomintang, began to exert its influence on the Malaysian Chinese.<sup>10</sup> In the

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10. The following account on the Kuomintang draws largely on the work of Png (1961:1-32 and 1962:214-225).

last few years before the close of the nineteenth century, there was growing sign of political consciousness among the Chinese when local Chinese press began to show an interest in and concern over the political development in China. They were more drawn towards Chinese politics when Kang Yu Wei and Sun Yat Sen visited Malaya at the turn of the century.<sup>11</sup>

During this period, from the turn of the century until the Second World War, the Kuomintang (KMT) dominated the political life of the Malaysian Chinese. The KMT was formed in China in 1912, after the successful Revolution of 1911, in which the Manchu dynasty was replaced by the Chinese Republic. During the same year, a KMT branch was formed in Singapore. Throughout the next year many branches were set up in Malaya. In all a total of thirty branches were known to have been registered in Malaya.

Prior to the formation of KMT branches, some revolutionaries had already come to Malaysia and other Southeast Asian countries with the specific purpose of developing and spreading patriotism among the overseas Chinese, and of obtaining

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11. Kang Yu Wei, a reformist, arrived in Singapore in February, 1900 after having fled from China at the time of the coup d'etat. With the support of a local Chinese, he started the Pao Huang Hui or the Royalist Party, thus introducing to the Overseas Chinese the idea of organized support of politics in China. Sun Yat Sen, commonly known as 'the father of Chinese Republic,' first visited Singapore in 1900 seeking support from the Overseas Chinese for his revolutionary movement in China. Later, in 1906, he formed the Singapore branch of the T'ung Meng Hui, a revolutionary organization, which became the nucleus of the subsequent KMT organization in Malaya. See Khoo (1973:130).

material support for the Revolution in China. It is for this reason that politics in China had a great bearing on the Chinese in Malaysia.

It is not known the actual amount of financial support the Chinese in Malaysia and other overseas territories contributed towards the Chinese Revolution of 1911. But certainly their financial support went a long way in helping to bring about the Revolution. Apart from material contributions, there were also reports that some young men fired with patriotism left for China to take an active part in the Revolution.<sup>12</sup> In view of this, it is not surprising that Sun Yat Sen called the overseas Chinese the 'Mother of the Chinese Revolution'.

The success of the Revolution in China brought jubilation to the Chinese in Malaysia, particularly Sun's supporters. More importantly, it served to strengthen the sense of nationalism and patriotism among many overseas Chinese. With the formation of KMT branches in various parts of Malaysia, the Chinese became more and more involved in Chinese nationalism and patriotism. The KMT set up the Reading Societies or the Shu Pao Sheh (書報社) as a medium through which the Chinese were informed of the

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12. In the Huang Hua Kang Rising (黃花岡之役) of 1911 - the most important attempt before the Wuchang Rising finally brought about the fall of the Manchus - a sum of M\$47,906 was sent by Malaysian Chinese to help finance it. Of the 72 martyrs who died, 14 were from Malaysia.

happenings in China.<sup>13</sup>

Apart from spreading nationalist ideas, the KMT had another important role to perform in the midst of overseas Chinese. This was the wooing of capital and the collection of funds. Before 1911, material support was needed to finance the Revolution. Now that the Republic was established, money was again needed for economic reconstruction. In this, China again sought assistance from the overseas Chinese, who were urged to help China's national development by investing in its industries.

Before World War Two KMT influence was widespread in Malaysia. This was particularly so among the Chinese merchants, shopkeepers and school children. The influence was kept alive by a constant stream of propaganda through the reading material and teachers from China. Textbooks with a China-oriented content also played a part. The result of all this was that the Chinese were very attracted by the politics in China. There was at that time relatively little local politics in Malaysia. At any rate it did not arouse much interest and enthusiasm among the Chinese. The majority of them were, so to speak, involved in the politics of their homeland. China was all important to them.

Despite the fact that the KMT aimed at perpetuating among

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13. The Reading Societies were the vital organs of the KMT. Their primary function was to propagate political ideas through reading material. But their avowed aim was always education. For this reason the Reading Societies were less vulnerable to government bans than the purely and openly political organizations.

the Chinese a national loyalty towards China, the Malayan Government in the beginning adopted a tolerant attitude. However, between 1924 and 1927, a spate of anti-British agitation, disturbances and strikes was carried out by the more extremist KMT left-wing elements, some believed to be communists.<sup>14</sup> Grave concern was expressed, and the Government began to fear the KMT to be an imperium in imperio just as it had feared the secret societies in their heyday. Thus, in 1930 the KMT was officially banned both in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay states. Nevertheless the KMT supporters continued to exist by carrying out their activities under the cover of educational or charitable organizations.

Before the official ban was imposed there had been a split in the KMT into the left and right. This was prompted by Chiang Kai-Shek's action in 1927 when he purged the KMT with its communist elements. Its effect in Malaysia was that the Communists split off into various organizations of their own, notably the South-seas Provisional Committee of the Communist Party and the South-seas General Labour Union. These organizations then began to compete with the KMT in gaining the support of the Chinese.

Two points need to be stressed in connection with the split of the KMT. Firstly, the Malaysian Chinese were already

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14. Between 1924-1927 the KMT opened its doors to the communists. It is believed that the subversive activities were mainly the work of the communists who worked under the KMT banner.



at this time divided ideologically between the left and the right. Secondly, Chiang's purging movement in China and its immediate repercussions in Malaysia indicated that Chinese politics in Malaysia was still largely an extension of China's politics. It had little to do with local politics.

There was apparently a good reason for the British colonial government to fear the KMT as an imperium in imperio. All along the Chinese government had claimed that all overseas Chinese were citizens of China and as such it was China's responsibility to look after their welfare. Furthermore, the KMT in China sent agents to Malaysia to extend its membership among the local Chinese. The local KMT branches were also active in inculcating among the Chinese a sense of Chinese nationalism. This keenness to protect the overseas Chinese must have led the British to think that the KMT's aim was to impose an imperium in imperio.

However, a closer look at the KMT's activities in Malaysia indicated that China's keenness to show concern over its overseas Chinese did not amount to an overt desire to impose an imperium in imperio, and hence the British fear was uncalled for. China was at all times interested in Malaysia and other Southeast Asian countries where the overseas Chinese settled. But its main interest was the wealth of the Chinese, not the territories as such. As indicated earlier, financial support had been sought from the Chinese abroad to help bring about the Revolution, and

during the post-Revolution period, money was again needed for economic reconstruction and national development. This, China again looked to the overseas Chinese for support. In order that the Chinese in Malaysia would continue to give China material support, China and its KMT branches had to show concern over them, if possible protecting them, and to kindle in them the flame of patriotism. Finally, the patriotic flame had to be kept burning. The KMT in Malaysia aimed precisely at these activities. It was purely China-centred. Malaysia was only regarded as a temporary stage where it could play China's politics. This partly refuted the popular view among the British officials that the KMT or the Chinese regarded Malaysia as terra irredenta<sup>15</sup> which China would annex some day.

Two further reasons suggested that the KMT had at no time regarded Malaysia as terra irredenta. Firstly, China and Britain most of the time had friendly diplomatic relations. There was simply no reason for China agitating for the Malaysian Chinese to rise against the local British government. In the second place, post-revolution China was hard put to the task of economic reconstruction and national development. It is inconceivable that a nation which was hardly able to stand on her own feet could seriously think of annexing territories overseas.

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15. Governor Clementi, who banned the KMT in 1930, made this claim. Cf. Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements (1930), B.26.

Our discussion of the KMT activities so far seems to point to one thing: that before the Second World War, with the exception of some local-born, the loyalty of the Malaysian Chinese was to China. This was particularly true of the China-born or the Group A Chinese as Wang (1970) calls them. Their loyalty was clearly demonstrated in the event of the Sino-Japanese War of 1937. The war sparked off in Malaysia a spate of anti-Japanese activities and roused Chinese patriotism to its apogee. The KMT, the Communist organizations, Chinese guilds and associations and schools were all brought together in an all-out effort to give the maximum support to China in her moment of danger. The slogan 'Save the Nation' echoed throughout the Chinese community. A large sum of monetary contributions was collected towards China Relief. Some Chinese who were fired with patriotism even went so far as to return to China to fight in the war.<sup>16</sup>

It is significant to note in this connection that in time of national danger and in an effort to save the nation (China), the Chinese in Malaysia acted quite solidly as a united group. Their feelings towards China were so strong that the ideological differences that had existed amongst them appeared to be of secondary importance and had largely disappeared for the time being. This was the time when the ranks were closed. They no longer thought of themselves as Cantonese, Hokkien, Hakka, or as Group A or Group B or Group C Chinese, but simply as Chinese.

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16. Between 1937 and 1940 Malayan Chinese sent M\$146 million to China. In 1941 alone, M\$110 million was remitted.

Apart from official reactions, there were voices of disapproval and resentment among the Malays as regards the China-centred politics of the Chinese in Malaysia. Newspapers both in English and Malay were often frank about the excesses of noisy Chinese nationalists. Now and then these Chinese were asked to show their loyalty to Malaysia by keeping China politics out of the nation. On the other hand, sympathetic voices were also raised on behalf of the loyal and accommodating Chinese and the hard working and peaceful majority (Wang, 1970:14). On the whole, however, the Chinese were quite free to play their KMT and some left-wing politics, as long as they did not stir up too much anti-British feeling and threaten the stability of the status quo.

We need to have a general understanding of the pre-war political situation in Malaysia in order to assess the implications of the politics of the Chinese. To do this, some appreciation of pre-war British policy is essential.

As indicated earlier, the Larut Wars in Perak finally ended with the Pangkor Engagement which served as an opening wedge and as a model for the further expansion of British influence in Malaya. The Residential System established in Perak in 1874 was followed by Selangor and Sungei Ujong (one of the nine territories constituting Negri Sembilan) in the same year. Pahang came under the system in 1888. Each of these states had separate administration until 1895 when the four states combined to form the Federated Malay States with a fairly centralized administration.

The four northern Malay states were under Siamese suzerainty until the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909 which transferred to Britain rights of suzerainty. With Johore in the south, these five states formed the Unfederated Malay States. In terms of administration, the Unfederated Malay States had more autonomy and were less directly under the control of the British as compared to the Federated Malay States.

Thus, there were three major political entities in pre-war Malaya, the Straits Settlements, the Federated Malay States and the Unfederated Malay States, as we have earlier discussed. The Straits Settlements were under the direct control of the Governor who was at the same time the High Commissioner of the Federated and Unfederated Malay States. The Resident in each of the Federated Malay States was subject to the central direction of the Resident-General and the High Commissioner. The Unfederated Malay States accepted British Advisers but retained greater autonomy and remained more traditional in their political system. In view of the fact that each Malay state still retained a certain amount of autonomy, it was not surprising that many historians referred to the country at this time as having no less than ten governments - the government of the Straits Settlements and the nine State governments. This anomaly was, if anything, indicative of the lack of political unity at the time. This lack of political unity may partly be attributed

to the population itself. The Malays at this time were still deeply concerned with regional loyalties, and had not yet developed a common national spirit. The Chinese were pre-occupied with improving their economic position while the Indians were primarily labourers on the estates whose main concern were to eke out a living (Ratnam, 1965:36).

The pre-war policy of the British administration had a pro-Malay bias while at the same time remaining benevolently humanitarian towards the immigrant communities. Basically, the pro-Malay policy followed three principles: firstly, as laid down in the treaties, the legal position of the Sultans was largely safeguarded; secondly, the political structure of the Malay government was largely preserved; and finally, the Malays were regarded as the indigenuous people, and the government accepted special responsibility for their welfare and the preservation of their rights as the 'sons of the soil' (Means, 1970:43). While helping to preserve the traditional pattern of the Malay society and its peasant-based economy, these policies did not in any way equip the Malays to face the challenge of a competitive economy.

These pro-Malay policies served to maintain Malay supremacy in the administrative and political field vis-a-vis other local communities. As far as the British were concerned, the governments were virtually in their hands because the 'advice' given to the sultans by the British Residents or Advisers had to be 'acted upon'. British control was most evidently manifested by the fact that the higher positions in the civil service were overwhelmingly staffed by British officials.

British indirect rule seemed to have functioned well in dividing the local communities into their separate compartments: the Malays were quite happy as long as they were given special concessions and the Malay trappings of the government retained; the non-Malays were also contented so long as they were left alone to go about their business. As a result, few complaints were made. The policy was remarkably effective in discouraging widespread political activity. Membership in the State Legislative and Executive Councils was largely appointed rather than popularly elected, and these councils had limited political power and merely served as advisory bodies to the government.

In spite of the discouragement on the part of the British authority, some organizations with political objectives did develop in pre-war Malaya. The notable Malay organizations were the Kesatuan Melayu Singapura (Singapore Malay Union), Persatuan Melayu Selangor (Selangor Malay Union) and the Kesatuan Melayu Muda (Union of Malay Youth).<sup>17</sup> The Chinese, as indicated earlier, had their organizations such as the KMT and Communist organizations. The most notable Indian organizations were the Young Men's Indian Associations and the Central Indian Association of Malaya. The former was founded in 1922 while the latter in 1936.<sup>18</sup>

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17. The Singapore Malay Union was founded in 1926 by Mohammad Eunos bin Abdullah, the founding of which marked the beginning of organized political activity by the Malays in Singapore. By 1937, SMU branches were formed in Penang and Malacca. The Selangor Malay Union was formed in 1935. It was the first of a number of similar Malay associations formed in other Malay states. The Union of Malay Youth, a radical Malay nationalist party, was formed in 1937. Cf. Means (1970:21-23).

18. During the 1930's the Central Indian Association of Malaya became an important vehicle for Indian nationalism in Malaya. Cf. Means (1970:39).

Of all these organizations, only those belonging to the Malays were more concerned with developments in Malaya.<sup>19</sup> The Chinese and Indians were more drawn towards nationalist movements in China and India respectively. Thus we had a situation in which the three communities were facing different directions politically: one was essentially local-oriented while the other two foreign-oriented. There was practically no need for intercommunal cooperation in politics. The political interests of the three communities were different. This was significant in that as a result of this, the ethnic communities were not as inclined to regard each other as political protagonists. Politics was therefore not an important factor in communalism. From the point of view of race relations, this situation at least provided a partial explanation of the relatively low intensity of communal conflict in pre-war Malaya (Means, 1970:44).

Turning back to Chinese politics, the pre-war period saw Group A Chinese most outspoken and active. The KMT consisted largely of Group A Chinese. So were the communist elements that split off from the KMT after 1927. In short, they dominated local Chinese politics. In order to extend their influence, they dominated the two related fields of education and publishing. Their strength grew rapidly as literate Chinese were imported to become teachers and to edit newspapers and magazines. Their ultimate aim was to encourage Chinese consciousness and make all the Chinese dedicated to China alone. Nevertheless, in spite of their enthusiasm and their near monopoly in education and the Chinese press,

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19. A qualification is necessary in this connection. Even the Malays became politically motivated partly as a result of reactions to events in Egypt, Turkey and Indonesia.



they were unable to surmount some of the difficulties facing them. First of all, they lacked financial resources. Their leaders were primarily modern Chinese literati and their supporters school-boys and poorer artisans and urban workers. Secondly, there were government restrictions on their activities. They could not preach and criticize as they pleased. Some of their more extreme leaders were even deported. (Wang, 1970:11).

With these limitations, Group A Chinese therefore depended on Group B Chinese majority for their support in order to carry out their mission. But the latter's support was not easy to come by. Group B Chinese have always been noted for their low-posture politics and their cautions and reservations. They were not prepared to risk their working arrangements with the colonial government and their control over well-established community organizations in order to fully support Group A Chinese. Being reserved and cautious Group B Chinese often adopted the middle-course and their aims were moderate. Some of them did support the KMT or the communist-dominated organizations. Their general attitude was that so long as they were assured of their community identity, there was room for a variety of political activities (Wang, 1970:12).

As for Group C Chinese who identified with the British power, their influence was still found in the colonial Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements. In both the FMS and UMS, however, they were less prominent. In both cases, their identification with the British power had probably caused them

to lose some of their earlier ability to communicate with the political elite. Furthermore, both the FMS and UMS favoured Malays in the civil service.

It is significant to note the Chinese image of themselves at this time. Group A Chinese were the most outspoken and their main target was the Group C Chinese. It was not uncommon for Group A Chinese to attack Group C Chinese for not being able to speak Chinese and for their collaboration with the British imperialists.

On the other hand, towards Group B Chinese, Group A's attitude was often gentle, mainly because the former was numerous and many of them rich. In order to gain their support, the tone must be persuasive and appealed to Chinese sentimentality. Occasionally, however, there were criticisms about Group B's timidity and opportunism when they were seen to be over-cautious.

Group C Chinese were generally defensive because of their 'UnChineseness' in the eyes of other Chinese. But now and then, they counter attacked Group A Chinese for their emotionalism and China-centred political actions which might endanger the Chinese community as a whole in the eyes of the local government. Occasionally, they also condemned Group B Chinese for their fence-sitting and their tendency to seek the best of all worlds.

Group B Chinese, who were attacked on both sides, rarely made any counter-attacks. They generally considered

politics to be a double-edged weapon to be used with great care. Because of their relative silence, it is difficult to determine what they really had in mind. But some evidence can be gleaned from Chinese newspapers editorials that they did have some admiration for Group A Chinese for their political convictions and were only critical of their methods. They also envied Group C's official and professional positions but were sorry for their loss of 'Chineseness' (Wang, 1970:14-15).

### The Malayan Communist Party

We have thus far seen two main currents of influence in the pre-war Chinese community in Malaya - the secret societies and the KMT. It was not until the outbreak of the Second World War that there appeared the prominence of another influential current - communism through the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). Beginning some time before the War, the Communist's influence remained a strong force even well after the war. In 1948, the MCP launched an armed insurrection, and triggered off a twelve-year guerilla-type warfare, affecting the whole Malayan nation in general and the Chinese community in particular.

As far back as the 1920's, Communist elements were beginning to become active in the KMT organizations. Chiang Kai-shek's purging of the Communists in China in 1927 had its repercussions among the Chinese in Malaya. There was a similar split in Malaya, causing most of the communists to go underground. But it was not until 1930 that the MCP was clandestinely formed to replace the Nanyang

Communist Party established in 1922. The declared intention of the MCP was to work for a Soviet Republic of Malaya (O'Ballance, 1966:23). The party was active in trade unions and responsible for labour unrest and sabotage in the mid-1930's. The MCP was never popular in its early days, its supporters being mainly Chinese labourers and workers. The reception from other ethnic groups has always been cold. Among the Chinese dialect groups, the Hainanese and Hakkas appeared to be especially attracted by Communism. It is difficult to determine why this was so. And there was little evidence to support Purcell's (1967:214) view that the Hainanese and the Hakkas were distinctly different from other mainland Chinese and their disposition to left-wing politics was partly to increase their prestige in the Chinese community by drawing attention to themselves.

The Japanese Occupation of Malaya in 1941 had a great impact on the country as a whole. To begin with, the Occupation destroyed the belief of the people in the invincibility and permanence of British rule. What had earlier seemed to be the 'superior protecting power' had now suffered a disastrous and humiliating defeat after some ineffective fighting.

The Occupation also severely disrupted the hitherto relatively harmonious relations of the different ethnic groups in the country. The policy of the Japanese was

essentially one of 'divide-and-rule'. Various attempts were made to win over the Malays. The authority and sovereignty of the sultans was recognized and the Malays continued to serve in the civil administration of the country. Some of the prominent Malay nationalists such as Ibrahim Yaacob, Ishak bin Haji Mohammad and Ahmad Boestamam were released from British imprisonment to be given employment in the Japanese administration. The Japanese also sponsored the Pembela Tanah Ayer Army (Avengers of the country) whose members were exclusively Malays.

Most important of all, from the point of view of race relations, the Japanese used the almost exclusively Malay police force to fight the Chinese resistance movement. Thus the resistance movement and its opposition became, in effect, a communal war. Under the order of the Japanese, the Malay (and some Indians) units launched attacks against Chinese guerilla forces. This led to strong resentment on the part of the Chinese, and immediately following the surrender of the Japanese there were a number of communal clashes in retaliation and counter-retaliation (Purcell, 1967:264-5). Fortunately, though bitter, these communal clashes were isolated and did not spread throughout the whole length and breadth of the country.

The bulk of the Indians, like the Malays, was not particularly active in the resistance movement. To the Indian nationalists, the Japanese appeared to be the potential liberators of their homeland. The Japanese supported

and encouraged the formation of the Indian Independence League, and recruited an Indian National Army in Malaya. It is clear that the Japanese' interest in the Indian Independence Movement was mainly in terms of their own pan-Asian ambitions, and this, they tried to achieve through making use of the Malayan Indians (Ratnam, 1965:18).

Of the three major communities, the Japanese Occupation aroused the greatest animosity and bitterness among the Chinese. It was the Chinese who suffered most under the Japanese tyrannical rule. Because of the long-standing enmity with China, the Japanese regarded the Chinese in Malaya as their natural enemies. The community as a whole was blamed for being uncooperative, and many communists and nationalists were promptly executed. When Singapore fell, it was reported that the Japanese ordered for the execution of 50,000 Chinese who were suspected of being communists, nationalists or of having connections with anti-Japanese movements. It was estimated that only half the number was eliminated. For the Japanese finally halted the massacres after realizing that it was impractical to execute such a large number of people (Means, 1970:46).

The Chinese had no liking for the Japanese invaders either. They had earlier expressed their hostility and hatred towards the Japanese (e.g. boycott of Japanese goods, called them Nippon Devils) immediately after the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and the Sino-Japanese war in 1937. It is therefore hardly surprising that the

Chinese, irrespective of KMT members or the communists, formed the bulk of the resistance movement. But it was the MCP which was most active of all. The MCP offered assistance to the British to fight the Japanese. The latter accepted the offer and trained some MCP men who later formed the core of the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA). The MPAJA, consisting almost entirely of Chinese, and controlled by the MCP, was the only important resistance group fighting the Japanese troops. Later, after the war, it was the same group of people who launched an armed revolt against the British colonial government in an attempt to establish a People's Republic of Malaya.

Apart from the fact that the war experience strengthened Chinese nationalism and their sense of communal identity, two other important changes occurred in the Chinese community during the Occupation period. In the first place, there was a change in the community's leadership structure, at least for the time being. The wealthy, traditional leaders either fled the country, or they remained and were executed or forced to come to terms with the Japanese. As a result, the pre-war merchant-dominated elite was largely discredited. Their place tended to be filled by the younger, more vigorous communist leaders or their sympathizers (Means, 1970:47). The second change - which was more important - was that the Chinese participation in the defence of Malaya against Japanese rule was a clear indication that they were

now beginning to take a more direct interest in local politics than ever before. Unlike the KMT, the MCP was local-oriented, its aim being to establish a People's Republic. Furthermore, there is no sound evidence that the MCP received any aid from or had any contact with either Moscow or Peking during the Japanese Occupation. The MCP had done it all alone to fight the Japanese (O'Ballance, 1966:58-59).

We are not concerned with the war between the MCP and the Japanese or between the MCP and the British colonial regime. What we are interested, however, is how communism has affected the political position of the Chinese in Malaya. In this connection, the Chinese in Malaya have been affected by communism in at least two ways. The MCP, which launched an armed revolt leading to an Emergency lasting for more than a decade, consisted almost exclusively of Chinese. This close association of the Chinese with communism leads to an over-generalization, though illogical, that most Chinese are either communists or their sympathizers. The over-generalization has been reinforced by the historical fact that the Chinese community as a whole did not actively support the Malaysian government in its effort to suppress communism. Secondly, the emergence of a powerful communist regime in China in 1949 has put the Malaysian Chinese into an embarrassing position. Not infrequently, they are being regarded by other communities as enemies within the gates, especially in the wake of a rising local nationalism (Freedman & Willmott, 1961:247-8).



There were thus three main currents of influence - the secret societies, the KMT, and the MCP - affecting the political life of the Chinese in pre-war Malaya. The secret societies were on the whole Chinese community-centred in that they had little to do with other communities. The KMT focused its attention on China and was merely an extension of China's politics, while the MCP can be regarded as Malayan-oriented because its aim was the establishment of a People's Republic of Malaya.

As regards the Chinese community itself, the community as a whole was gradually becoming settled, even though links with China - especially sentimental ones - were still strong. Politicall , however, the majority of the population were still apathetic, at least towards local politics. Most of the Chinese seemed to hold the impression that it was more profitable to attend strictly to their own business, rather than to engage in politics which appeared dangerous and unprofitable.

## CHAPTER 4

### CHINESE POLITICS IN MALAYSIA: THE POST-WAR PERIOD

The post-war period saw a more settled Chinese population in Malaya. Consequently, the Chinese were showing more concern over their political rights. The MPAJA's achievements during the war and during the interregnum period before the return of the British also gave the Chinese a new spirit and a sense of pride. For the organization had always been looked upon as a Chinese guerilla army. This new spirit was coupled with a determination to take a more active part in shaping the future of the country. The war experience had brought home to them that life in China was not that attractive after all. The thoughts and ambitions of many Chinese were now switched from their homeland and re-focused on Malaya (O'Ballance, 1966:62).

The major political event that took place immediately after the war was the proposal to set up the Malayan Union. Under the new scheme, two major changes were introduced. First, the pre-war administrative structure was to be re-adjusted whereby the nine Malay states together with the two Settlements of Penang and Malacca were to be merged into a single political entity known as the Malayan Union. Singapore was to be excluded from the Union and remained a separate Crown Colony. Secondly, a common Malayan Union citizenship was to be created; so that equal citizenship rights would be given to all who were born and resident in Malaya (Ratnam, 1965:45).

The new proposal unfavourably affected the Malays in two ways. First, the sovereignty of the Sultans was undermined, and the government under the new policy would be carried out directly under the name of the British Crown. Secondly, the pre-war 'special position' accorded to the Malays was to be ended as a result of the new citizenship proposals. Under these circumstances, the severe agitation against the proposals on the part of the Malays at that time is understandable. Mass demonstrations and rallies were held throughout the country by the Malays to voice their opposition to the Union scheme. Within a matter of weeks the Malays had even formed a political organization - the United Malay National Organization (UMNO) - to protest against the new constitution. They also boycotted the installation ceremony of the new Governor of the Union on April 1, 1946. The agitation continued until the Union Scheme was dropped two years later and in its place a Federation was substituted.<sup>1</sup>

The Union Scheme, while undermining the pre-war privileged position of the Malays, was certainly very much to the advantage of the Chinese. The most obvious gain of the Chinese was the creation of a common citizenship that would give them equal status with the Malays. But to the astonishment of many, the Chinese did not greet the proposals

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1. For an excellent and scholarly account of the birth and demise of the Malayan Union, see Allen (1967).

with any particular enthusiasm. In terms of either intensity or the extent of popular support, the reactions of the Chinese community did not in any way equal those of the Malays. By and large, general apathy was the keynote of Chinese reaction. Those who opposed the proposals generally belonged to the left-wing intellectuals and did not gather much mass support, and those who supported them made little effort to counter Malay opposition (Ratnam, 1965:49).

While the Malays opposed the new proposals for the proposed equal citizenship and the abandonment of 'special rights' and the manner in which the sultans had been consulted,<sup>2</sup> the Chinese who opposed seemed to deplore the manner in which they themselves had not been consulted. They also objected to the exclusion of Singapore from the mainland (Purcell, 1967:286).

The three major Chinese political organizations at the time - the MCP, the KMT and the MDU<sup>3</sup> - all showed no more than lukewarm attitude towards the Union proposals. The MCP, although endorsing a unified Malaya in principle, objected to the details of the proposals. Nevertheless, the party did no more than confining its activities to press comments through its daily The New Democracy (Sin Min Chu).

2. It was generally felt that the proposals were introduced in an arbitrary and high-handed manner without much regard for the opinions of the sultans. Cf. Ratnam (1965:47).
3. The MDU (Malayan Democratic Union) was founded in 1945 in Singapore. It was not a purely Chinese organization; rather, it was a non-Malay, leftist organization. Its supporters consisted largely of English-educated, westernized elements among the Chinese, Indian and Eurasian communities.

The KMT was essentially not interested in Malayan politics except in so far as it impinged on China's politics. The MDU favoured the Union scheme, but was critical of the new constitution for not giving full power to a completely elected legislature. All in all, no sustained effort was made either to support or to oppose the new policy (Purcell, 1967:286-7). There was no attempt, for example, on the part of the MDU to hold any counter-demonstrations to oppose the UMNO.<sup>4</sup> Neither was there any gesture made to the colonial government that it could count on the MDU support in the event of its defending the Union proposals against Malay pressure. The real opposition from the UMNO to the Union proposals so much to the advantages of the Chinese was largely ignored (Silcock & Aziz, 1950:29-30).

While the Chinese as a whole showed little enthusiasm in the Malayan Union scheme of 1946, they certainly took a keener interest in the Federation Proposals designed to replace the former.<sup>5</sup> This change of attitude from one of indifference to keener interest was mainly due to the realization that their interest was threatened under the

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4. The KMT and MCP were illegal organizations and as such they could not hold demonstrations openly.
  5. The Federal Proposals were in a sense a reversal of the Malayan Union scheme, which the British felt imperative to abandon as a result of strong Malay opposition. The new Federal scheme reverted to the pre-war pro-Malay policy. The sultans' position was strengthened and the special position of the Malays reintroduced. Under the scheme, it was possible for non-Malays to become citizens, but the regulations governing their eligibility were more stringent as compared to those of the abortive Malayan Union Scheme.

new scheme. They objected to the exclusion of Singapore with its predominantly Chinese population as well as the restrictions of citizenship.<sup>6</sup> They also demanded the Malay membership in the new Legislative Council be reduced from 31 to 20, for fear that their economic interests would suffer under the Malay majority.<sup>7</sup>

In protest, the Chinese community led by Tan Cheng Lock<sup>8</sup> staged a one-day hartal (stoppage of work) in Malacca on September 9, 1947. Apparently pleased with the result,

6. The 1947 Census figures show that the total population of Malaya (including Singapore) was 5,848,910, of which 2,614,647 were Chinese. Singapore alone accounted for 940,324, of which 730,133 were Chinese. Excluding Singapore, the number of Chinese in Malaya was reduced to 1,884,524 (38.4%) out of a total of 4,908,086, giving the Malays a numerical superiority (about 49.4%) over the Chinese. See del Tufo (1949:40, 132-3).
7. The total number for the Council was 75 of which 50 were Unofficial members. Of the 50 Unofficials, 22 were Malays, 14 Chinese, 7 Europeans, 5 Indians, 1 Eurasian and 1 Ceylonese. This distribution gave the Malays an overall total of 31 seats, i.e. 22 Unofficials and 9 representatives from State Councils, and thus the greatest racial minority. See British Malaya vol. XXII, No.11 (1948:352-3) and Simandjuntak (1969:54).
8. Tan Cheng-lock (1883-1960), a Straits Chinese, was the foremost political leader in the Chinese community. He served in the Legislative and Executive Councils of the Straits Settlements in the 1930's. He was Chairman of the All-Malaya Council of Joint Action, founder-president of the Malayan Chinese Association and Joint Chairman of the Alliance National Council. He was knighted in 1933.

he successfully persuaded the AMCJA<sup>9</sup> to hold a nation-wide hartal on October 20, 1947. The move was supported by the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce, the MCP and its affiliated trade unions. With the exception of the east coast and Johore, the hartal was generally a success, affecting in particular Chinese businesses and factories. Nevertheless, Chinese and Indian opposition to the new scheme did not in any way represent a forceful and sustained effort compared to the Malay effort to oppose the Malayan Union Scheme, and did not secure any major political concessions from the British. The Federation of Malaya was finally established in February 1, 1948.

The political and constitutional development<sup>+</sup> between 1946 and 1948 had far-reaching effects in Malayan history, particularly on communal relations. The Union Scheme, though abortive, served to divide the Malays and the non-Malays, particularly the Chinese, and intensify communal tensions that had already been generated by the Japanese Occupation.

Both the Union and Federation proposals also inspired an unprecedented interest in politics among the Malays, and (to a lesser extent) the Chinese, though for different

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9. AMCJA - All-Malaya Council of Joint Action was formed with the primary aim to oppose the Federation Proposals. Its membership comprised a mixed bag of organizations - the MDU, the Malayan Indian Congress, The Straits Chinese British Association, 12 Women's Federations in Malaya, the Malayan New Democratic Youth League, the Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Ex-service Comrades' Association and the Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions. Three Malay radical nationalist organizations - the Malay Nationalist Party, Angkatan Pemuda Insaf (API) and Kesatuan Melayu Muda - also joined the AMCJA for a short while.

reasons. This in turn resulted in, for the first time in Malayan history, the emergence of organized communal agitation for political and constitutional ends (Ratnam, 1965:43).

Despite the intensification of communal tensions as a result of political agitations, the years between 1946-1948 also witnessed inter-communal co-operation in the political scene. The AMCJA, which was predominantly non-Malay, had as its members three Malay radical organizations - the Malay Nationalist Party, the Angkatan Pemuda Insaf and the Kesatuan Melayu Muda. This inter-communal coalition had in common the object of fighting the Federation proposals, commonly considered a product of British-Sultans-UMNO negotiations. After a short while, the Malay organizations withdrew from the AMCJA to form their own 'front' under the name of Putera.<sup>10</sup> A coalition between AMCJA and Putera was then effected in a joint effort to oppose the Federation proposals.

The co-operation between AMCJA and Putera had always been tenuous because of some fundamental differences on communal issues. No doubt, both were unhappy with the proposed Federation Agreement. But their objections were based on different premises. The AMCJA's main bone of contention was the pro-Malay bias of the new scheme and demanded equality for all races while the Putera's main

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10. Putera is the abbreviation for Pusat Tenaga Rakyat (Centre for People's Force). Its major aim was to agitate for constitutional revision, and among its members were the MNP, API, the Angkatan Wanita Sedara and several other small associations.



objection was the continuation of colonial rule under the new constitutional proposals. In order to facilitate co-operation, however, some concessions and compromises had to be made.<sup>11</sup> But the conflict between the demands by AMCJA for equal rights and the demands by Putera for Malay special privileges remained largely unresolved.

As things turned out, this first major inter-communal coalition<sup>12</sup> failed to win popular support from either the Malays or the non-Malays. It finally became defunct with the outbreak of the communist revolt and the subsequent declaration of the Emergency, since most of its left-wing member organizations were outlawed.

Many factors were responsible for the coalition's failure to win popular support. The non-Malay population, even though more settled and more interested in local politics as compared to pre-war years, still had a general disinclination to engage actively in politics. The bulk of the commercial and professional classes were uninspired by the anti-colonial slogans of the AMCJA-Putera coalition, and was generally suspicious of left-wing politics (Ratnam, 1965:151).

11. Putera supported AMCJA's "People's Constitutional Proposals" which inter alia, demanded Malaya's independence including Singapore. AMCJA, in return, agreed that Malay representation in the Federal Legislative Assembly should be 55%, and that Malay should be made the official language. Cf. Means (1970: 85-91).
12. Since the membership of the AMCJA was predominantly Chinese, and the Putera consisted exclusively of Malays, the coalition was essentially one of Sino-Malay co-operation.

The vast majority of the Malays at this time seemed to be more attracted to the right-wing UMNO which had identified with Malay interests alone. There is also reason to believe that the strong communist element in the coalition<sup>13</sup> might have frightened away the Malays (Ratnam, 1965:151).

Above all, the coalition's failure to win widespread support may be paradoxically explained in terms of its emphasis on ideology and on a common Malayan nationalism (Ratnam, 1965:152). At a time when communal interests dominated the political arena, neither the Malays nor the Chinese were sophisticated enough and prepared to commit themselves to such a seemingly 'non-communal' inter-communal organization.

#### The Malayan Chinese Association (M.C.A.)

As earlier mentioned, the Federal Constitution came into effect in 1948 despite some opposition from the non-Malays and a small number of Malay left-wing radicals. The new Constitution severely restricted the citizenship rights of the non-Malay communities, in addition to restoring to

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13. Some member organizations within the AMCJA, particularly the Malayan New Democratic Youth League, the Malayan Anti-Japanese Ex-service Comrades' Association and the Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions were communist-controlled.

the Malays their former special privileges.<sup>14</sup> Two major communally-based political parties had emerged at this time, the UMNO representing the Malays and the MIC (Malayan Indian Congress) for the Indians. The Chinese community, however, had no single, Malayan-centred political party to foster and further its interests. Generally speaking, the political strength of the community was dispersed and consequently it spoke with no clear voice on matters concerning the community as a whole. Even the commonly considered powerful Chinese Chambers of Commerce and the Chinese Assembly Halls which represented the conservative

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14. There were two categories of citizenship: a) citizenship by operation of law, and b) citizenship by naturalization. Under the first category, the following persons were defined as citizens:-

- a. a Subject of the Ruler of any state;
- b. any British subject born in either of the Settlements (Penang or Malacca) and permanent resident in any part of the Federation;
- c. any British subject born in Malaya whose father was either born in Malaya or had resided in Malaya for a continuous period of at least 15 years;
- d. any person born in Malaya, and both of whose parents were also born in Malaya and had resided there for a continuous period of at least 15 years;
- e. any person whose father was, at the time of that person's birth, himself a Federal citizen;
- f. any person who habitually speaks the Malay language and conforms to Malay custom;

The following persons were to fall into the second category:-

- a. either (i) he was born in Malaya and had been resident for 8 out of 12 years preceding the date of his application, or (ii) he had been resident in Malaya for 15 out of 20 years preceding the date of his application;
- b. that he was of good character,
- c. that he had an adequate knowledge of Malay or English,
- d. that he would be willing to take an oath of allegiance to Malaya.

Cf. The Federation of Malaya Agreement, 1948, pp.40-43.

Chinese appeared at this time to have little effective influence on the government. With all these unfavourable circumstances, it is understandable that the political fortunes of the Chinese at this time were described as 'at a low ebb' (M.Roff, 1965:40-41). Furthermore, the bulk of the Chinese community were shaken by the MCP decision to resort to armed struggle against colonial rule. The Emergency that followed immediately the revolt almost sealed the fate of the Chinese in Malaya. The reason was that the colonial government regarded most Chinese as communists or communist sympathizers. There was even a suggestion to deport half a million Chinese squatters who were suspected of aiding communists on masse to China.

The founding of the first Malayan-centred Chinese political organization did not come into being until 1949. On February 27, 1949, the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) was formally inaugurated with Tan Cheng-lock as its first president.<sup>15</sup> The main aims of the MCA seemed to be the promotion of solidarity among the Chinese, safeguarding of Chinese rights and interests, and the preservation of inter-communal harmony.<sup>16</sup>

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15. There were different versions as to how the MCA was originated. The MCA version is that its formation was first initiated by the then High Commissioner who summoned "Chinese leaders, headed by Dato Cheng-lock Tan to a meeting and asked them to organize the Chinese in aid of the government". See The MCA 20th Anniversary Souvenir (1969:55), and Soh (1960:51).
  16. The MCA has been characterized by a note of ambivalence since its formation. On the one hand, the MCA tries to assure the Chinese that it is committed to safeguarding Chinese rights and interests, and on the other hand it tries to convince the Malays that it aims at promoting inter-communal harmony and achieving a united Malayan nation. This is the tightrope that the party has been trying to walk ever since. Cf. M.Roff (1965:42).

The response to the MCA was very encouraging. Within a year its membership was estimated to be over 100,000. In 1951 the figure was put at between 160,000 and 200,000. Although these figures and subsequent ones are doubtful, the fact remains that the MCA had a good start and the growth was continuous (Soh, 1960:52).

The MCA was essentially a conservative, right-wing organization whose leadership was dominated by wealthy Chinese. As a conservative party, the MCA was regarded as a 'super-organization' loosely co-ordinating the various traditional Chinese organizations such as the trade guilds and dialect associations. In this sense, therefore, the vast majority of the MCA supporters consisted of what Wang (1970:19) called Group B Chinese. The MCA leadership, however, was not confined to Group B Chinese. Prominent Group C members were included among its leadership hierarchy.<sup>17</sup> This was found necessary because it was recognized that only by including Group C Chinese leaders who were acceptable to both the British and the Malays could the Association function in an effective manner.

Thus, the formation of the MCA was essentially based upon a co-operation between Group C and Group B Chinese. Generally speaking, Group C Chinese provided the leadership (and their connections with the British and the Malays) and

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17. Tan Cheng-lock was a good example of Group C Chinese. Born a Straits Chinese, he was committed to the ideal of a united Malayan nation with equality for all races. For an account of Tan and his political views, see Soh (1960) and Tan (1947).

Group B Chinese provided the supporters. The formation of MCA not only provided an opportunity for Group C Chinese to claim a strong political base, but also launched the majority of the Group B Chinese into full participation in local politics (Wang, 1970:20).

During its early years of existence, the MCA did not compete against, nor did it ally with other communal parties. However, it co-operated with the Government in its anti-communist campaign. The Association helped the Government in the resettlement of Chinese squatters into 'new villages'. It also organized a regular lottery the proceeds from which were used to provide amenities for residents of the 'new villages'.<sup>18</sup> In addition, it also helped the Government's drive to recruit the Chinese for the Home Guard movement, Police and Military services. From its activities, it would seem that the MCA at this early stage was more like a social welfare organization.<sup>19</sup> It was not until the introduction of local elections in 1952 that the MCA became a full-fledged political party, deeply involved in the politics of the day.

Apart from safeguarding the interests of its members, the MCA also set itself to promote inter-communal harmony

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18. The lottery was put to a stop in 1953 by Sir Gerald Templer, the then High Commissioner, who feared the lottery funds to be used for political purposes.

19. The MCA, however, has claimed that it started as a purely political organization. See The MCA 20th Anniversary Souvenir (1969:55).

and unity in the country. In his inaugural speech, Tan Cheng-lock said:

It is a matter of supreme significance and indisputable necessity that a basic purpose of this organization must be the attainment of inter-communal understanding and friendship, particularly between the Malays and the Chinese. (Ratnam 1965:154)

In another address, Tan again stressed the MCA's aim to promote inter-communal unity:

One of the basic aims of the MCA is to help in co-operation with the Malay and other communities, the development of the process of making the whole of Malaya one country, one people and one government.... We aim at inter-communal unity and fraternity, national liberty and racial equality, which are the foundation of true democracy. (Tan, 1966:3)

Inter-communal harmony and unity still remains to be one of the main objectives of the MCA today.<sup>20</sup>

As a conservative, right-wing organization, MCA support has always come from the conservative elements of the Chinese community, particularly the business class. Before Merdeka (Independence), the support MCA received from the Chinese community had been very encouraging, partly because it was the only major Chinese political organization purporting to represent the Chinese. However, over the years, as will

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20. The 1970 MCA Constitution listed among its aims "to maintain, foster and promote goodwill and harmony among the citizens of various races in Malaysia so as to ensure the peaceful progress and growth of a strong and united nation". See Constitution of the Malayan Chinese Association (1970:2).

be shown later, the party has been troubled by internal conflict and become weaker and weaker, both in terms of its support within the Chinese community and in terms of its influence in the Alliance. It is certainly true that the MCA has never had a firm hold on Chinese loyalty to the same extent as the UMNO has on the Malays. Thus although the MCA is the organization which is supposed to represent the interests of the Chinese community in the present ruling party - the Alliance, there is no assurance that its views are representative of those of the Chinese community at large.

1952 was an important year for Malaya as well as the MCA. For the former, it was the first time local elections were introduced; for the latter, it was the year when the MCA became a political party proper by contesting the local elections. Of more importance, perhaps, is the fact that the two major communal parties - the UMNO and the MCA - decided to form an electoral alliance to fight the Kuala Lumpur Municipal Elections. Unlike the earlier AMCJA-PUTERA coalition, this UMNO-MCA cooperation in politics proved so successful that it paved the way for subsequent inter-communal co-operation. The present Alliance Party (consisting of UMNO, MCA and MIC) had its beginnings in this first electoral co-operation.

In order to understand how the UMNO-MCA electoral alliance came about, it is necessary to introduce the Independence of Malaya party (IMP) into the picture. The



IMP was formed in 1951 by Dato Onn bin Jaafar. Its formation was the first major attempt to bring together people of different ethnic origins into one non-communal party. It is significant to note that the attempt was made by Dato Onn, leader of the Malays and the then UMNO. Dato Onn, committed to the cause of non-communalism, and having obtained assurance of full support from the leaders of the Chinese community and the MCA, resigned as the leader of the UMNO to establish the IMP. The new party had some encouraging beginnings, with support from people of different ethnic origins, notably the Indians. But it was not long before it became clear that the IMP failed to win mass support, either from the Malays or from the Chinese.<sup>21</sup>

The electoral alliance between the MCA and the UMNO began just before the first Kuala Lumpur Municipal elections in 1952. It was clear at that time that the IMP posed a menace to the two major communal parties, the MCA and the UMNO. It was felt by the leaders of the two communal organizations that if the IMP was not defeated, there would be defections from their organizations. Mutual opposition to the IMP was therefore an important factor to prompt the formation of the Alliance. Another personal consideration was also important in bringing about the Sino-Malay co-operation. It was related to the initiative of Colonel H.S. Lee,

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21. The Malays were particularly alarmed at IMP's efforts to provide more rights and opportunities for the non-Malays. The Chinese, after seeing Dato Onn's failure to obtain support from his own community, began to doubt his leadership and lose interest in the organization.

who was the then MCA's Vice-president and President of its Selangor Branch. The Colonel had earlier been completely ignored by the IMP and was not too happy about the incident. Thus he became the prime mover to seek MCA-UMNO Alliance in an attempt to defeat the IMP (Soh, 1960:56). In view of the circumstances for its formation, it can be said that the earlier MCA-UMNO Alliance was nothing more than a 'a marriage of convenience'.

The electoral alliance, however, proved to be very successful at the Kuala Lumpur Municipal elections. It was continued at other similar elections, with equally encouraging results.<sup>22</sup> This success led leaders of both parties to think more seriously about their temporary alliance. A series of negotiations were held between the leaders of both organizations and some agreements were reached.

Some time before the 1955 Federal elections, the MIC was added to the fold of the Alliance. This was then the beginning of the UMNO-MCA-MIC Alliance embracing the three major communities in the country. The Alliance has become the country's ruling party since its landslide victory in the first Federal elections of 1955.

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22. The MCA-UMNO Alliance captured 9 seats at the Kuala Lumpur Municipal elections. The IMP won 2 seats, and 1 seat went to an Independent. During 1952 and 1953, the MCA-UMNO alliance won 94 out of a total of 124 seats contested in various municipal and town councils elections throughout the country.

While the Kuala Lumpur elections of 1952 was a victory for the UMNO-MCA Alliance, it spelt disaster for the non-communal IMP. Several factors contributed to the very poor showing of the IMP. Lack of organizational base and lack of middle and lower level leadership were some of them. But most important of all, the atmosphere at that time was strongly communal. Voting was largely based on communal considerations (Vasil, 1971:59).

The failure of the IMP to gain popular support and its dissolution after only two years of existence<sup>23</sup> was a clear indication that talk of non-communal politics at this time was premature and perhaps meaningful only at the academic level. The elections had still to be fought and won on communal platforms. This still seems to be the case today. Communal consideration continues to be an integral part of party programmes in the Malaysian political scene. The Alliance party, which consists of three communal parties, is far from non-communal. Although it fights elections as a single organization, there is little doubt that its constituent bodies continue to function on communal lines (Ratnam, 1965:161).

In so far as the Chinese community was concerned, the first half of the 1950's witnessed a distinct trend towards increased participation in political activity by the MCA in particular and the Chinese community in general. There was also a trend towards inter-communal co-operation in

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23. The IMP dissolved itself in 1953. It is interesting to note that its most notable achievement was 'the indirect and ironical one of bringing about the formation of the UMNO-MCA alliance. See Soh (1960:56).

politics. This last seems to be an interesting feature exhibited by many plural societies during their pre-independence era. Different circumstances might have given rise to different reasons for inter-communal co-operation. But one reason in common among many plural societies was the presence of colonial rule. In order to render colonial exploitation as costly and as unsuccessful as possible, members of the middle-class from different ethnic groups often co-operated with one another in the political arena (Rabushka & Shepsle, 1972:75).

Since Independence (1957), as one might have expected, a number of changes have occurred in the politics of the Malayan Chinese. To begin with, a greater number of Chinese have qualified to be citizens and increasingly they have turned their attention towards local political problems that confront them. This change of attitude is important because the more the Chinese become identified with Malaya (Malaysia since 1963), the more they are dissatisfied with the discriminatory policies of the government in favour of the Malay community. Consequently, many become disillusioned with the political party that claims to represent them, like the MCA, which they think has done little to safeguard their interests. A great number of them shift their support to other Chinese political organizations, thus weakening the MCA. There are also those Chinese who are dissatisfied with the present position of the Chinese language and education which they feel have been losing ground over the years.

A major development since Independence has been the intensification of party politics and the rise of Chinese political organizations.<sup>24</sup> These political organizations may now be briefly considered to provide a background for our discussion.

### The United Democratic Party (U.D.P.)

The UDP was formed in 1962 by a group of MCA dissidents who left the party following the 1959 crisis in the Alliance. Led by Dr. Lim Chong Eu, who was the MCA president before he left it, the UDP was essentially a Chinese organization: its leadership was dominated by those who had left the MCA in 1959; its supporters were also largely those Chinese who had become disillusioned with the MCA.

The claim made by its leaders, however, was that the party was for all and non-communal. Dr. Lim Chong Eu, for example, declared at the inaugural meeting of the party:

We are forming a truly patriotic national organization in which all citizens will enjoy equal rights... It will not think in terms of communalism but will work positively as a united nation, (Straits Times, April 22, 1962).

To convince the public that the party was a genuinely non-communal party, several Malays were elected to the Executive Committee. This included Dato Zainal Abidin bin

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24. Chinese political organizations here refer to either those with purely Chinese membership or those that owe their existence mainly to Chinese support (i.e. Chinese-dominated parties). It should be remembered, however, that not all these parties were formed after Independence. The Labour Party, for example, was founded before Independence (in 1952).

Haji Abas, a very prominent Malay who was elected the President of the party at its first General Assembly in 1963. Despite this non-communal image, the party had very little support from the Malay community. This was clearly shown in the 1964 General Election, in which the party put up 36 Malay candidates, and none of them was successful.<sup>25</sup>

The bulk of the party's membership was Chinese. It comprised largely the Chinese-educated, middle-class people who were at one time the supporters of the MCA. It is thus hardly surprising that the rank and file was largely committed to securing a rightful place for the Chinese language and education which they felt the MCA had neglected. It is also significant to note that a large part of the membership was young people below the age of thirty-five (Vasil, 1971:266-7).

The UDP had never been a strong party. It had a poor performance in the 1964 General Election, presumably due to lack of a clear position on important issues such as Chinese language and education, and lack of proper organization. It was concerned with winning some Malay support and in so doing it let down and lost the support of many Chinese who had earlier regarded it as a champion of their interests (Vasil, 1971:265). The UDP dissolved itself in 1968 and many of its members then joined the Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia.

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25. Among its Chinese candidates, only five were returned, all in predominantly Chinese constituencies.

The Labour Party

The Labour Party was formed from a group of regional (state) Labour parties in 1952. In its early years of existence, the party's leadership was dominated by a group of moderate, socialist oriented professional people, both Chinese and non-Chinese, who were closely associated with the Malayan Trade Union Council. Almost all the earlier Chinese leaders in the organization were English-educated.

Until 1969, the Labour Party had been the main ideologically based and socialist oriented party in Malaysia.<sup>26</sup> Still, in an atmosphere where communal considerations were important, the Labour Party was not able to free itself from communalism. It was originally founded as a genuinely non-communal organization, and thanks to its leaders, the party was able to stick to its principles and assume its non-communal character during the pre-Independence period. But after Independence, communal pressures manifested themselves more intensely. Increasingly many Chinese-educated Chinese who had been dissatisfied with the MCA swelled the ranks of the party. These people were able to establish almost full control over the party by 1961. The Labour Party then found it increasingly hard to maintain its non-communal orientation and eventually became a pro-communist Chinese communal party (Vasil, 1971:93).

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26. In 1969, the Labour Party decided to opt out of constitutional politics and boycotted the 1969 general election. The party has become defunct since then.

The programmes drawn up by the Labour Party in its early years of existence were moderate. Regarding Malaya's Independence, for example, the party recommended a 'gradual transfer of power', i.e. Malaya's independence should be established in three stages, to be completed by 1964 (Straits Times, Oct. 25, 1953). Nothing was mentioned on the rights and interests of the Chinese community especially with regard to their language and education. The party at this early stage was very much under the influence of Britain, because most of its leaders were government servants or associated with unions of government servants.

The character of the party began to change in 1954, when a more socialist-oriented group joined it. In 1955, before the first Federal election, the party issued a ten-point manifesto, which among other things pledged immediate self-government for Malaya (and union with Singapore to create a common Malayan nation) and a planned economy. It also recommended public ownership of the means of production (Straits Times, May 10, 1955).

In 1956, in its memorandum to the Reid Constitutional Commission, the party advocated racial equality for all in the country.<sup>27</sup> Among other things, it also recommended Malay as the National Language but that 'English, Chinese and Indian languages be taught in schools and spoken in the councils'.<sup>28</sup>

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27. The Reid Constitutional Commission was set up by the British Government to draw up a Draft Constitution for Malaya. It was made up of entirely non-Malayans.

28. Memorandum to the Reid Constitutional Commission, submitted by the Labour Party of Malaya, Penang, Sept. 25, 1956.



It is important to note that throughout the pre-Independence period the Labour Party was faithful to its ideology and principles. It did not deviate from its principles purely to adjust to the compulsions of the plural society. No communal appeal was attempted. Neither did it make any significant compromises just to please one community or another. (Vasil, 1971:119).

After Independence, however, as indicated earlier, membership was swelled by the Chinese educated Chinese. The party gradually lost its non-communal character and assumed the role of championing the cause of the Chinese.

The change in the policy orientation of the Labour Party was accompanied by a significant change in the character of its membership. During the early fifties, when the party was in its infant stage, support came largely from ordinary and English-educated white-collar workers, many of them Indians. The support was primarily concentrated in some urban centres, particularly Penang and Kuala Lumpur. Since Independence, with the replacement of its English-educated leadership by the Chinese-educated, the party had found a strong support from the Chinese-educated in the urban centres and new villages. There was an insignificant number of non-Chinese members (Vasil, 1971:162).

The Labour Party together with the Party Rakyat launched the Socialist Front (SF) in 1957.<sup>29</sup> The SF was built on an

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29. Party Rakyat, the foremost Malay radical left-wing party was formed in 1955 by Ahmad Boestamam, a Malay nationalist.

Alliance-type formula, but unlike the Alliance Party, it was a left-wing alliance. In 1964, a new component, the National Convention Party<sup>30</sup> was added to the SF fold. This ideologically-based SF was formed originally in the hope of strengthening both the Labour Party and Party Rakyat, since support for the former was mainly Chinese in urban centres and the latter was based on rural areas and consisted primarily of Malays. The National Convention Party was also restricted to rural Malay support. Despite its ideological orientation, the SF could not escape the threats of communal differences. The partnership finally broke up in 1965 mainly as a result of disagreement over communal issues.

#### The People's Progressive Party (PPP)

Formed in 1953 by two brothers of Ceylon Tamil origin, the influence of the PPP is almost exclusively restricted to Perak, especially in Ipoh and its surrounding towns. The party claims to fight for equality for all racial groups. To achieve this, it recommends the abolition of the special rights accorded to the Malays, equal treatment in the selection of jobs and the abolition of different classes of citizens. On the important question of language and education policy, the party demands that an independent committee be set up to

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30. The National Convention Party was formed in 1963 by Abdul Aziz bin Ashak, who was a former Minister of Agriculture in Tengku Abdul Rahman's Cabinet, and one of the vice-presidents of UMNO. He left the Cabinet and UMNO as a result of clashes with Tengku over policies.

formulate a policy suitable and acceptable to the needs and aspirations of the people. It further presses for the recognition of Chinese and Tamil as official languages in addition to Malay.<sup>31</sup>

Due to its image as the champion of the cause of the non-Malays and the powerful personal appeal of the Seenivasagam brothers, the party has done fairly well in Perak, particularly in Ipoh.<sup>32</sup> But its influence never goes beyond the state of Perak. The bulk of its membership comes from Chinese workers, many of whom live in new villages and are Chinese-educated.

#### The Democratic Action Party (DAP)

The DAP was officially formed in 1966.<sup>33</sup> Because of its coherent and clear-cut policy, it has been able to provide the leadership and rallying point for non-Malay discontents and disillusionment with the MCA and the MIC, and emerged as the major opposition (Vasil, 1972:16). In the 1969 General election, the party captured 13 out of a total of 104 seats, and polled 13.73% of the votes.

31. PPP, 'Malaysia for Malaysians', People's Progressive Party of Malaya Manifesto, May, 1969.
32. The party has controlled the Ipoh Municipal Council for a number of years. It is represented by 4 members in the present Parliament. Cf. Vasil, (1971:247, 249).
33. Its founder was Devan Nair, who won the 1964 General Election on a PAP ticket. When Singapore seceded from Malaysia in 1965, Devan Nair, as a Malaysian citizen by birth, chose to remain in Malaysia and led the Malaysian-based PAP. However, the Government was reluctant to allow the PAP to operate in Malaysia on the ground that it was now foreign-based. The party was deregistered in September 1965. As a result, Devan Nair formed the DAP (whose programme was very similar to Singapore's PAP) which was registered in March, 1966.

The party's 'basic guiding policy and principles' are contained in 'The Setapak Declaration' announced in July, 1967. To begin with it is committed to 'the ideal of a free, democratic and socialist Malaysia, based on the principles of racial equality, and social and economic justice'.<sup>34</sup>

On the important question of language, education and culture, the DAP accepts the use of Malay as the National Language, but emphasizes the constitutional guarantee to give freedom to the use of languages of the other communities. It regrets, however, that this constitutional guarantee is 'rendered sterile by an educational policy which does not permit the free use of the Chinese and Tamil languages as media of instruction and of examination in national-type secondary schools'. The party seeks the use of Chinese, Tamil and English languages for official purpose as well as media of instruction and of examinations in secondary schools.<sup>35</sup>

In its manifesto for the 1969 General election, the DAP put forward three main objectives: political democracy, social and economic democracy, and cultural democracy. Under political democracy the party asserted that all citizens regardless of race, language, or religion should enjoy equal political status, rights and opportunities, that 'all Malaysians must have an equal place under the Malaysian sun'.

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34. Democratic Action Party, 'The Setapak Declaration', 1967, p.3.

35. Ibid., pp.5-6.

Under social and economic democracy, the DAP called for the ending of exploitation of man by man, class by class or race by race, and the eradication of economic, social and educational imbalance between rural and urban sectors. As regards cultural democracy, the DAP listed the following among its main objectives:

- a. Official status for the Chinese, Tamil and English languages, and acceptance of Malay as the National Language to serve as the common language of expression and communication among Malaysians.
- b. Free use of Chinese, Tamil and English in the Parliament, State Assemblies, and in public notices and government correspondence.
- c. Abolition of the distinction between national and national-type schools.
- d. Immediate solution of the question of recognition of Nanyang, Formosan, Indian, Middle Eastern and Indonesian degrees and qualifications, on the basis of internationally accepted standards of assessment.
- e. Government support for the National University and the Merdeka University projects.<sup>36</sup>

The DAP's stand over cultural democracy was clear. This is significant because it related to issues of vital interests to the non-Malay communities. It was the only major party, apart from the Perak-based PPP, that demanded the recognition of Chinese and Tamil languages as official languages in addition to Malay. The party soon emerged as the champion of the cause of the non-Malay communities. For this reason, it is hardly surprising that its support comes largely from the non-Malays especially the Chinese-educated Chinese. Presumably many of these Chinese are formerly MCA or Labour Party supporters.

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36.. Democratic Action Party: DAP General Elections Manifesto, 'Our Triple Objective', Towards a Malaysian Malaysia.

The Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Gerakan)

The Gerakan, a non-communal party, was inaugurated in March, 1968. Its key sponsors were Dr. Lim Chong Eu (the founder of UDP), Dr. Tan Chee Khoon and V. Veerapan (both were former leaders of the Labour Party) and a few intellectuals including Professor Wang Gungwu and Professor Syed Hussein Alatas. A striking feature of the party was that its leadership consisted mainly of English-educated moderates, many of whom left their former parties after finding it difficult to maintain their non-communal character (Vasil, 1971:304-5).

The Gerakan's aim was to build a genuinely non-communal party based on moderate socialism and democracy. To sustain its non-communal character, it was quite concerned with winning the support of the Malays. For example, in its policy statement issued in April, 1968, it recognized 'the need to accord special attention and emphasis on the economically weak Malays and other indigenous peoples' and maintained that 'they should be protected from exploitation and assisted to compete with other communities on a just basis in business, trade and the professions' (Vasil, 1972:61).

On the contentious question of language and education, the party adopted a compromised position. It upheld the status and position of Malay as the National Language and at the same time pressed for the 'legitimate use of all languages'. It also called for 'parallel development' of

the different media of instruction in the educational institutions from primary to tertiary levels (Vasil, 1972:64).

The party attempted to attract the support of trade unions by electing to its committee several trade union leaders. It also issued a Workers Charter dealing with problems of workers and trade union movement.

The party won eight Parliamentary seats in the 1969 General election and polled 8.57% of the votes. Despite its non-communal character, the party's membership and support comes largely from the non-Malay communities. Its strength is concentrated mainly in Selangor, Perak and Penang. In Penang the party captured the State Government, winning 16 out of 24 seats.

A significant fact about all these major non-Malay opposition parties is that there are no fundamental differences in respect to ideology and political programmes. All of them attempt to fight for equality of rights in an integrated Malaysian nation. Their main differences are the intensity of their commitment to the interests of the non-Malays and the value they attach to the necessity of establishing contact with the Malay community (Vasil, 1971:307).

With this brief background in mind, we are now in a better position to look at Chinese participation in Malaya's party politics. This, we will do by examining the various general elections that have been held.

The Chinese and the 1955 Federal Election

The 1955 election was the first major general election held in Malaya before it attained Independence. The most outstanding feature of the Malayan electorate at this time, as Ratnam (1965:186) puts it, 'was its uneven communal composition'. The Chinese community was very much under-represented. Of a total of 1,280,000 registered electorate, 84.2% were Malays, less than 5% Indians, and Chinese only accounted for 11.2%, as can be seen from the Table below (Ratnam, 1965:187).

Table 4.1 The Communal Breakdown of the 1955  
Malayan Electorate

<u>Communal Group</u>	<u>Voters</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Malays	1,078,000	84.2
Chinese	143,000	11.2
Indians	50,000	3.9
Others	9,000	0.7
Total	1,280,000	100.0

It is estimated that only half the adult Chinese population, approximately 600,000 were eligible to vote, and of this number only 143,000 (roughly one in four) registered. As a result, only about one Chinese in eight actually cast a vote (Carnell, 1955:316).



This low rate of Chinese participation in the 1955 election has been explained by one observer as indicating a general lack of interest in public affairs (Mills, 1958:94). It has also been explained as reflecting a lack of interest and of confidence in the electoral process (Economist, June 25, 1955). Still another writer suggests the main cause as 'the feeling of ineffectiveness which a minority group so often feels' (Tinker, 1956:260). While all these might have been possible reasons, one important factor should not be overlooked. Lack of citizenship rights effectively excluded a large number of Chinese and Indians from the electorate. Nearly half of the 1,200,000 adult Chinese were not qualified for citizenship at the time of the election, and hence ineligible to register as electors (Carnell, 1955:316 and Haas, 1967:67).

As a result of the uneven communal distribution of the electorate, the urban electorates in particular were, in effect, largely unrepresentative minorities. The best examples of this were the two Kuala Lumpur constituencies (Kuala Lumpur Timur and Kuala Lumpur Barat), where out of a total population of 255,000 only 22,000 (less than 10%) were registered as electors. Of those who registered, 64% were Malays. But the Malays, as a community, were heavily outnumbered by the Chinese and Indians in Kuala Lumpur. Therefore, it can be said that the Chinese opinion in these urban areas remained largely untested (Carnell, 1955:316; Ratnam, 1965:188).

When the election results were announced, the inter-communal Alliance Party had a landslide victory, capturing 51 out of a total of 52 seats.<sup>37</sup> The party received a total of 79.6% of the valid votes. Commenting on the election, Carnell (1955:315) wrote: "The most surprising thing about the election for the new Malayan Legislative Council was not the triumph of the Triple Alliance of the United Malays National Organization, the Malayan Chinese Association and the Malayan Indian Congress - this was generally expected - but that this party should have so completely annihilated its opponents".

Even more significant, however, is the fact that all the 15 MCA candidates were successful. Many of these candidates stood in predominantly Malay constituencies and defeated their Malay opponents from Party Negara by large majorities. Although all the MCA candidates were elected, there was no way to determine the real strength of the party. Too many Chinese had been excluded from the electorate. And whether those who were not eligible to vote would have supported the MCA is a moot point. The election results did not tell us whether the businessmen-dominated MCA really spoke for the whole Chinese community or only for a small segment of it (Haas, 1967:74).

On the whole, the election results showed that there was little evidence of voting along strictly communal lines. Malay electors outnumbered non-Malays in 50 out of the 52

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37. The only seat lost by the Alliance was in Krian (Perak) where its Malay candidate was beaten by a PMIP candidate by a small majority of only 450 votes.

constituencies. Yet all the 17 non-Malay (15 Chinese and two Indians) candidates were returned. Had there been communal voting, it is likely that some Malay candidates from the PMIP and Party Negara would have been elected. Tengku Abdul Rahman referred to the election results as 'the first step towards racial harmony' in Malaya (Straits Times, July 29, 1955). Undoubtedly, the voting was a 'first step', but not a complete demonstration of non-communal voting since only the Malays had a full chance to exercise their franchise. The election was at best a Malay triumph over communal appeals. The voting behaviour of the Chinese and Indians was largely untested, since they comprised only a small proportion of the electorate.

There were only two constituencies - George Town and Ipoh-Menglembu - where Chinese electors had a clear majority. There were no Malay candidates in either of these constituencies. In George Town all the three candidates were Chinese, while in Ipoh-Menglembu there were two Chinese and two Indians. In both constituencies, Chinese candidates were returned. This clearly means that the ability of the Chinese to vote non-communally or otherwise was not effectively tested. The fact that in both instances the Chinese candidates elected belonged to the Alliance Party can be taken as an indication that the Chinese had voted along party and not communal lines, and they seemed to have preferred inter-communal politics (Ratnam, 1965:199).

### The 1959 General Election

The 1959 General Election was the first election that took place after Malaya's Independence. The background and setting of the 1959 election was different from those of 1955 in three important aspects. First, the British had left, and Malaya had been given Independence. Second, there was a great change in the size and composition of the electorate, resulting in a great increase in the voting strength of the Chinese. Third, a change in the leadership of the MCA occurred in March, 1958. The new leaders proposed changes in the Alliance's policies on language and education. The UMNO was confronted with the prospect of working with a new set of Chinese leaders. The possibility of dissension in the Alliance Party on a highly contentious issue was also evident (Haas, 1967:91).

In the 1955 election, the Alliance's slogan Merdeka overrode all communal concerns and assured it an overwhelming support from all communities. The hope to achieve merdeka also gave the Alliance politicians an unifying issue. Now that Merdeka had been achieved, domestic issues of communal significance became of more immediate concern. The Alliance partners had to find a mutual agreement on contentious issues such as citizenship, language and education. It was largely in these areas that Sino-Malay differences remained. The question before the 1959 election was whether the Alliance partners were able to find sufficient

common ground to continue the inter-communal co-operation (Haas, 1967:92). There were signs as to the problems of reconciling the demands of the Chinese and the claims of the Malays within the party.

In so far as the electoral process was concerned, there were two important changes that affected the 1959 election. First there was a marked increase in Chinese voting strength, both absolutely and relatively. The following table reveals the Chinese voting strength in relation to other communities:

Table 4.2 Communal Breakdown of the Electorate, 1959 Election

<u>Communal Group</u>	<u>Voters</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Malays	1,217,000	56.8
Chinese	764,000	35.6
Indians	159,000	7.4
Others	4,000	0.2
Total	2,144,000	100.0

(Ratnam, 1965:200).

By 1959, the Chinese electorate had increased from 11.2% in 1955 to 35.6%, so that in 1959, the communal distribution of electors was much more in proportion to the country's ethnic composition.<sup>38</sup>

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38. Smith (1960:40-41) suggests that the increase in Chinese and Indian electorate was due to (i) the new Malayan Constitution of 1957 which made it easier for non-Malays to obtain citizenship, and (ii) special concessions were given to those who applied for citizenship within 12 months after Independence. See also Ratnam (1965:201).

The Second electoral change was the increase in the number of elected seats, hence constituencies. The former Legislative Council became the Dewan Rakyat (House of Representatives) after Independence and the original 52 constituencies were now increased to 104.

This increase in both the Chinese electorate and constituencies had two important outcomes. In the first place, the electorate became far more representative of the general population. This was especially true of urban areas where most of the Chinese tended to settle. Secondly, in 1959, the Malay electorate only predominated in 66 out of the 104 constituencies. In the 1955 election they had heavily outnumbered the Chinese in all but two of the 52 constituencies.

All in all, in so far as the Chinese were concerned, the situation was a great deal better and more satisfactory than it had been in 1955. 'The feeling of ineffectiveness' in the electoral system had largely disappeared, for with their stronger voting strength, they were now in a position 'substantially to influence the outcome of the elections' (Ratnam, 1965:201).

As indicated earlier, the change in the MCA leadership occurred in March, 1958, when Tan Cheng-lock, seeking re-election to a fifth term as the MCA president, was defeated by Dr. Lim Chong Eu by a vote of 89 to 67. Close supporters of Tan Cheng-lock were also ousted in the power struggle by Lim Chong Eu's group which was dissatisfied with MCA policies.

Ong Yoke Lin was replaced by Too Joon Hing as Secretary-General and Tan Siew Sin (son of Tan Cheng-lock) was removed as Publicity Chairman in favour of Yong Pung How.

The new MCA leadership came to be known as the 'Young Blood' or the 'Young Turks'. The 'Young Turks' were obviously more concerned with the rights and interests of the Chinese community. Before his election, Lim Chong Eu had indicated that he would give greater priority to Chinese interests and Chinese unity, but not at the expense of abandoning the Alliance (Means, 1970:205).

The emergence of new MCA leaders undoubtedly posed a number of problems for the UMNO. UMNO leaders were not at all certain if the new leaders would co-operate with them and make compromises and concessions to the Malays like the MCA 'old guards' used to do. Tengku Abdul Rahman was obviously disturbed by the outcome of the MCA election. He was disappointed that Tan Cheng-lock had been ousted, but expressed hope that the new MCA would continue to co-operate with other partners of the Alliance (Straits Budget, March 26, 1958). Promises to that effect by Dr. Lim allayed some misgivings, but uncertainty and distrust among the UMNO leaders remained. Tun Ismail, the then UMNO Secretary-General, who earlier warned that the unity of the Alliance depended on the outcome of the MCA election, described Tan Cheng-lock as 'the true symbol of a Malayan Chinese', and said that the Malays had confidence in him

(Haas, 1967:102-4). It appears that the UMNO leaders preferred the MCA 'old guards' such as Tan Cheng-lock, and hoped that the new MCA leaders would conform to their image of the Malayan Chinese: ever willing to yield to the Malays.

The victory of the new MCA leadership did not eliminate its internal dissension. Dr. Lim's group could not gain full control over all MCA branches. 'Old Guard' leaders like Tan Siew Sin and Ong Yoke Lin still had firm control over the MCA branches in their respective states.

The newly elected MCA leaders were eager to re-organize and revitalize their party. Firstly, they hoped that re-organization would strengthen the Party and make it more representative of the Chinese community by securing a broader support. Secondly, re-oragnization was also designed to strengthen the party's Central Working Committee and bring about unity within the party. Another major motive for re-organization was that this would give them greater control of the party and eventually they could prevent Tan Siew Sin and Ong Yoke Lin and their associates from staging a political comeback (Haas, 1967:105; Means, 1970:205).

As a first step to revitalize the MCA and secure a broader support, the new leaders sought the support of Chinese guilds and associations. This, they tried to achieve by dropping all disciplinary action against MCA rebels who had



earlier followed the delegation of the Chinese guilds and associations to the London Conference on Malayan Constitution.<sup>39</sup>

The new leaders in their proposed new MCA constitution suggested the affiliations of Chinese guilds and associations whose representatives would have voting power in the Central Committee. The MCA's aim to affiliate Chinese guilds and associations was in effect to attempt to win the support of their followers. It must have been felt by the new leaders that the wealthy businessmen and professional men in the MCA leadership had little in common with the ordinary labourers and workers (who formed the bulk of the Chinese population), and the Chinese school teachers. These people tended to become members and supporters of the Chinese guilds and associations. The Chinese school teachers had particularly objected to the failure of the MCA to press for the Chinese language as an official language (Haas, 1967:108). This

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39. Dissatisfied with the MCA's role in the Alliance as regards representatives to the Reid Commission on Malayan Constitution, the various Chinese guilds and associations resolved to send in May 1957 their own delegation to London to present to the British government a 'Chinese point of view' in the final negotiations on the Malayan Constitution. The delegation was led by Lau Pak Khuan, president of the Perak Chinese Assembly Hall and a prominent leader of the MCA. Two other members of the delegation were Tan Kee Gak, a founder member of the Malacca MCA and Yap Mau Tatt, who was a former executive secretary of the MCA. The delegation demanded among others the principle of jus soli in citizenship and the Chinese language to be made an official language. Having closely associated with the delegation, all the three were suspended from the MCA. Cf. Haas, (1967:107) and Means (1970:200-1).

proposal to affiliate guilds and associations, if successful, would have strengthened substantially the MCA's position in the Alliance.

The revised new MCA Constitution contained other important changes, the most controversial ones being the centralized control of finance of the branches, the absolute power of the Central Working Committee to nominate candidates for federal elections, to discipline, expel or fine members for breach of party discipline (Means, 1970:205).

The attempt of the new leaders to reorganize the party and broaden its support was aimed at winning a greater voice in the Alliance. Since Independence, the MCA had learnt that it only occupied a secondary role in the Alliance, while the UMNO was a dominant member. By assuming a greater power in the Alliance, the new leaders sought to effect a change in the balance of power between the Chinese and the Malays (Haas, 1967:106).

The efforts of re-organization by the new leaders evoked fears among 'old guard' leaders as well as the UMNO leaders. The 'old guard' leaders feared that their power and influence in the party would be undermined.<sup>40</sup> The UMNO leaders probably feared that a stronger MCA would assume

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40. This was related to the new revised constitution as regards to centralised financial control. The Selangor and Malacca branches were the biggest and richest, and headed by 'old guard' leaders Ong Yoke Lin and Tan Siew Sin respectively. If the new leaders succeeded in removing financial control from these branches, they would have undermined the bases of the 'old guard' leaders. However, this new plan to centralise financial control was later forced to be dropped by the Association branches. Cf. Haas, (1967:112).

a great political power in the Alliance, thus making fewer concessions to the UMNO. Tun Ismail, UMNO's Secretary, was quick to react to the proposed new constitution of the MCA. He referred to the proposal to incorporate Chinese guilds and associations as 'unrealistic' and warned that if implemented it might harm the Alliance (Haas, 1967:117). He was probably aware of the increased strength of the MCA if the guilds and associations were to be incorporated.<sup>41</sup>

Tun Ismail also took exception to the new leaders proposal calling for the union of Singapore with the Federation. He described the proposal as 'unworkable'. Tengku Abdul Rahman, head of the UMNO, also came out against any immediate moves to prepare the way for the merger. Their reactions were understandable since merger would result in the increase of the Chinese population and make the Malays a minority in their own country.

As expected, the revised constitution was opposed bitterly by the 'old guard' leaders. The proposals were finally considered by the Central General Committee. After a few hours heated debate, a vote was taken. A total of 75 votes were in favour of adopting the proposals, with 50 against and one abstention. Since amendments to the MCA constitution required a three-fifths majority, a legal dispute ensued over the result of the vote. The new proposals were only considered passed by a three-fifth majority if the abstaining

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41. The various guilds and associations were said to have a total membership of over 100,000.

ballot was not counted in the total. If the abstaining vote was added to the total, the three-fifth majority fell short of one vote. However, as presiding officer, Dr. Lim ruled that the abstention did not count and the amendments had obtained the required majority. But Tan Siew Sin and Ong Yoke Lin refused to recognize the legality of the new constitution. And in early 1959, the Registrar of Societies announced his rejection of the revised constitution on the grounds that it failed to secure a necessary three-fifth majority and that it violated the law by allowing a foreign political party (the Singapore MCA) to affiliate with the MCA (Haas, 1967:123).

With the new constitution rejected by the Registrar of Societies, it had to be revised and re-submitted for his consideration. Many compromises had to be made between the 'Young Turks' and the 'old guards'. The redrafted constitution that was finally approved by the Registrar contained few of the provisions that the 'old guards' had earlier opposed.<sup>42</sup> This meant a clear victory for the 'old guards' leaders. The new leaders' attempt to win wider support was destroyed since the guilds and associations were not permitted to be incorporated into the party.

On the face of it, the adoption of the new constitution by the MCA appeared to give the impression that the party had

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42. The Chinese guilds and associations were not allowed to be affiliated to the MCA under the new constitution. Only political organizations with the 'same objectives', as the MCA could apply for affiliation. The earlier proposal for transferring the state branch funds to the headquarters was also dropped. State branches were also assured the power to nominate candidates for elections. Cf. Haas (1967:127).

achieved a new degree of unity which had been lacking since the new leaders emerged. Whether the dissension between the 'young Turks' and the 'old guards' had actually been eliminated was difficult to ascertain. What was evident, however, was that both factions still retained their separate supporters and sources of power.

While the dispute over MCA's new constitution was temporarily settled, two other major issues within the MCA loomed large and threatened to break up the Alliance party. The first of these was the position of Chinese education and language, which had always been the concern of the vast majority of the Chinese. The Razak Education Report generated bitterness and opposition among the Chinese who feared that the government aimed at slowly destroying their education and language. Strong opposition and attack came especially from two strong organizations closely identified with the operation of Chinese schools, the United Chinese School Teachers' Association and the United Chinese School Committees' Association. The mounting bitterness and discontent of the Chinese community as a whole resulted in the formation by the MCA of a Central Education Committee to look into the implications of the Razak Report for Chinese education. The MCA also held discussions with the UMNO so as to reach some agreement on the possible changes in the government's education policies.<sup>43</sup>

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43. The Razak Report and the language-education issue will be fully discussed in chapter 5.

The second issue was related to the MCA's role in the Alliance. In July, 1959, just a few weeks before the General election, the MCA Central Working Committee resolved that the MCA should be allotted 40 seats in the Federal election on the ground that there were 39 constituencies in which the Chinese voters outnumbered the Malays.<sup>44</sup> The intention of the MCA was to secure a one-third of the total number of seats. The MCA leaders feared that if they were not given a minimum of one-third of the seats, it could result in an amendment of the Constitution by the Malays without the consent of the Chinese. Amendments to the Constitution required a two-third majority. The MCA felt that securing a one-third of the seats was a sure way of safeguarding their interests.

The demand for more seats for the MCA was obviously an attempt to strengthen the MCA's position in the Alliance. It was also an attempt to win more political power for the Chinese. At least two factors could have influenced the MCA's demand for more seats. First, as the MCA itself recognized, there were 39 constituencies where Chinese voters outnumbered the Malays. Second, the Chinese accounted for more than 35% of the electorate in 1959 as compared to only 11.2% in 1955.

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44. Another resolution passed by the MCA was that the Alliance Manifesto should 'clearly express its intention to review in general the implementation of its educational policy so that the medium of examinations in Chinese schools could be the medium of instruction'. Cf. Vasil (1971:27).

In connection with the allocation of parliamentary seats in the Alliance, Dr. Lim Chong Eu, president of the MCA had earlier written a private letter to Tengku Abdul Rahman, the UMNO's president. Apart from asking the Alliance to allocate 40 seats to the MCA, Dr. Lim also made several other requests: that the Alliance election Manifesto should promise to review the education policy; that MCA candidates should be chosen by the MCA itself, not by the Alliance National Council; and that the Alliance Manifesto should clearly express the Alliance determination to uphold the Federal Constitution as it stands.<sup>45</sup>

There had been no public mention of Dr. Lim's letter until it was released without Dr. Lim's knowledge.<sup>46</sup> The letter was accompanied by a press statement issued by the Chairman of the MCA Publicity Committee, Yong Pung How:

The MCA will stand absolutely firm on the issue of Chinese education and the allocation of seats for the MCA..... If we do not succeed in getting what we think is fair, the MCA General Committee will decide on July 12 whether we fight under the Alliance banner or on our own.... (Haas, 1967:156)

Yong Pung How also indicated that as a compromise, the MCA might accept 35 seats. This would still provide the MCA with one-third of the total 104 seats (provided that all their candidates were returned).

45. Dr. Lim's private letter to Tengku first appeared in the China Press of July 8, 1959, and reproduced in the Straits Times of July 10, 1959. Cf. Means (1970:212,223).

46. Responsibility to release the letter was later acknowledged by Yong Pung How, MCA's Publicity Chief. See M. Roff (1965:51).

The release of the contents of Dr. Lim's letter to the Tengku and Yong Pung How's press statement evoked a storm of protest from the UMNO. Tengku Abdul Rahman reacted very angrily. He referred to the publication of the letter as an 'ultimatum' and 'a stab in the back'. He also announced that the UMNO and MIC would contest the election as the Alliance with those MCA leaders who did not support Dr. Lim's stand - in other words without Dr. Lim and his supporters (Means, 1970:213,; Vasil, 1971:30). Later, the Tengku announced in a press conference that he was taking over the functions of the Alliance National Council and would personally handle the allocation of seats and the selection of candidates.

The Tengku's reaction had obviously surprised Dr. Lim. Dr. Lim was a moderate leader who favoured co-operation between the MCA and UMNO. The two leaders met on July 12, 1959, and both agreed to settle the crisis on Tengku's terms. These terms were later announced by Dr Lim in an Emergency meeting of the MCA's Central General Committee.

With regard to the allocation of seats it is most likely that we shall be allocated 32 seats... Nomination of candidates will be made by the Tengku alone, because of the shortness of time, but before finalizing the list I would be consulted... (The education) clause will not be included in the manifesto but the government will implement it by administrative directive as soon as possible.

(Vasil, 1971:30-31).



The MCA Central General Committee voted to reaffirm its faith in the Tengku and the Alliance, and accepted Tengku's terms by 89 votes to 80. This decision means the failure of the 'yong Turks' to secure a greater power for the MCA.

In the final allocation of seats, the MCA was given 31 seats, the MIC 3 seats and the remaining 70 seats went to UMNO. It is interesting to note that in accordance with the agreement, the Tengku undertook the selection of the MCA candidates. Dr. Lim Chong-Eu was neither consulted nor even shown the list of candidates.

The final list of the MCA candidates selected by the Tengku showed that all the 'young Turks' who were responsible for the MCA-Alliance crisis were excluded; only those candidates who were acceptable to the UMNO were nominated. This list included Tan Siew Sin and Ong Yoke Lin, both of whom did not even enjoy the confidence of the MCA rank and file, but were given safe Malay majority constituencies. The action of the Tengku to exclude the MCA new leaders in the elections was not without reasons. These new leaders had advocated equality for all racial groups. The UMNO feared that if they were allowed to last through the election, they might be able to stabilize their position in the MCA, thus threatening the supremacy of UMNO in the Alliance. To the UMNO, the sure way of assuming a firm control over the MCA was to select candidates it felt acceptable (Vasil, 1971:31-32).

The new leaders who were removed by the Tengku from the effective participation in the Alliance felt that the Tengku behaved like a 'dictator'. Completely frustrated, many of them chose to quit the party. Within a few days it was reported in the press that over thirty MCA officials at both the State and Federal level had resigned.<sup>47</sup>

The MCA split resulted in a great deal of dissatisfaction among the Chinese, especially those who were Chinese educated. The split also affected the MCA adversely in the 1959 Federal election. Only 19 of its 31 candidates were returned.<sup>48</sup> Further, the MCA candidates were successful only in constituencies with a significant Malay vote, where the votes of the Malays largely compensated for the defection of the Chinese voters. The MCA candidates fared badly in predominantly Chinese constituencies (Vasil, 1965:62). Many of the seats lost by the MCA went either to the Socialist Front, PPP or the Independents.<sup>49</sup>

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47. Those who resigned included Yong Pung How, Too Joon Hing, Chin See Yin, Ng Ek Teong, Quek Kai Dong and Tan Suan Kok. Dr. Lim Chong Eu resigned shortly afterwards and went to Britain for 'medical treatment'. He was replaced by Dr. Cheah Toon Lok who headed the Kedah MCA and who had taken an active role in bringing about a reconciliation between the MCA and the UMNO.
48. The Alliance won 74 of the 104 seats (UMNO won 52, MCA 19, and MIC 3). It suffered a decline in popular support, winning only 51.5% of the total votes (as compared to 79.6% in 1955). Cf. T.E. Smith (1960:46).
49. The SF won 8 seats, PPP 4 seats and Independents 3 seats. Two of the successful Independent candidates were Chin See Yin and Quek Kai Dong who left the MCA after the crisis. Too Joon Hing, MCA's former Secretary-General, was elected to the Parliament in a by-election in May, 1961.

It is clear from the 1959 election results that many Chinese were dissatisfied with the MCA and the Alliance. Tan Siew Sin and his close associates have generally been more concerned with their business interests.<sup>50</sup> They have allowed the UMNO to dominate the Alliance. They lack a popular base among the Chinese and are dependent on the UMNO for their position in the MCA. As a result these leaders are unable to assert an equal position for their party in the Alliance. (Vasil, 1971:33).

The 1959 MCA-UMNO crisis clearly indicated the dominant position of the UMNO in the Alliance and its unwillingness to make concessions to the Chinese. In order to maintain Sino-Malay co-operation in the form of the Alliance Party, the MCA had to make almost all the concessions. The helplessness of the MCA in the Alliance is perhaps best summed up by Yong Pung How:

... the MCA has outlived its usefulness and is no longer able to carry out even the main objects for which it was formed.... The MCA is finished. The abject surrender (to the UMNO) yesterday showed it no longer stands for anything. It crawled back to the Alliance after being kicked out. The terms (set) by the Tengku were such that no self-respecting organization would have accepted them.

(Haas, 1967:169).

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50. The 'old guards' (Tan Siew Sin and his associates) took over the leadership of the MCA in 1961.

### The 1964 General Election

While there was substantial change in the size and composition of the electorate in the 1959 election, the change in 1964 had not been very substantial. The proportion of Chinese electorate rose by two percentage points to 38%, as compared to 54% Malays and 8% Indians and others (Ratnam & Milne, 1967:368).

This was the first election after the formation of Malaysia in September 1963. There were a total of 279 candidates contesting the 104 parliamentary seats. Of the candidates 94 were Chinese, 168 Malays and 17 Indians. The corresponding figures for 1959 were 79, 157 and 23 respectively. The increase in the number of Chinese candidates was largely the result of the entry of the PAP and UDP which together fielded 26 Chinese candidates. The Socialist Front also contributed to the increase by putting up eight more Chinese than in 1959. While the overall figure for Chinese candidates had increased from 79 in 1959 to 94 in 1964, there was a substantial decrease in the number of Chinese Independent candidates, from 17 to 3. This was because in 1959, a special reason prompted a number of Chinese to stand as Independents, namely the pre-election Alliance-MCA crisis which resulted in the resignation of some key MCA figures. Some of these ex-MCA leaders stood as Independents. By 1964, most of these MCA rebels had either joined the UDP or had returned to the MCA (Ratnam & Milne, 1967:82-83).

With regards to the communal breakdown of candidates within the ruling party, there was no major change of policy in 1964. In 1959, as noted earlier, the dispute over the allocation of seats almost brought about the dissolution of the Alliance. This problem did not seem to appear in 1964. The MCA had a better deal than in 1959, obtaining 33 nominations, an increase of two. The UMNO and MIC were given 68 and 3 nominations respectively. While clearly reflecting the inter-communal structure of the party, the Alliance line-up also showed the relative dominance of the UMNO vis-a-vis its partners, since the Chinese formed the most numerous group in 42 constituencies and Malay electors formed the most numerous group in only 62 constituencies (Ratnam & Milne, 1967:86, 107). The Socialist Front, like the Alliance, reflected its inter-communal structure by fielding 28 Chinese, 30 Malays and 5 Indians.

The election came at the time when Indonesia launched its 'confrontation' and 'crush Malaysia' campaign. Indonesian 'confrontation' and the threat which it posed to Malaysia's security therefore became the central issue in the election campaign. The Alliance capitalized on the issue and put the opposition on the defensive. As a result, contentious issues like the position of the Chinese language and education, the special position of the Malays, issues which had played a decisive role in the 1959 election, were relegated to secondary importance.

The language-education issue, though of secondary importance as compared to the question of national security, was quite earnestly taken up by the opposition parties, in particular the UDP and the PPP. Both the UDP and the PPP accused the Alliance of discriminating against Chinese education and language, and the MCA of not having done enough to protect and preserve the position of Chinese education (Ratnam & Milne, 1967:127-130).

The election results showed that the Alliance was returned with a very comfortable margin. It captured 89 of the 104 Parliamentary seats.<sup>51</sup> Opposition parties only won 15 seats (PMIP - 9, SF - 2, PPP - 2, UDP - 1 and PAP - 1). Of the 33 MCA candidates 27 were returned. Again, as in 1959, they were successful only in constituencies which had a sizeable Malay vote. In predominantly Chinese constituencies, the MCA candidates had, by and large, been defeated by non-Malay opposition candidates. This clearly indicated that the MCA did not have the solid support among the Chinese. Its candidates were able to win only in constituencies where the defection of Chinese voters could be compensated for by the votes of the Malays (Vasil, 1965:49).

#### The 1969 General Election

By 1969, before the general election took place, there was the emergence of two new political parties - the DAP and

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51. The Alliance won 58.5% of the total valid votes, as against 51.8% in 1959.

Gerakan. Both parties were essentially non-communal, and both drew their support largely from the non-Malay communities. Both parties claimed to fight for equality for all citizens. On the emotive issue of education and language, the Gerakan pressed for 'the legitimate use of all languages' and examinations to be held in the main medium of instruction.<sup>52</sup> The DAP went even further. It was committed to seek the 'official status for the Chinese, Tamil and English languages' in addition to Malay. As a result, the two parties, especially the DAP, were able to attract a significant number of young people from the Chinese and Indian communities and provided the leadership and rallying point for non-Malay discontent= and disillusionment with the MCA and MIC.

The Alliance suffered serious reverses in the 1969 Parliamentary election, even though it still retained a comfortable majority to rule. It won only 66 out of 104 seats, and secured only 48.4% of the valid votes compared to 51.8% and 58.5% in 1959 and 1964 respectively. The MCA, Alliance's constituent part, suffered a crushing blow more serious than any other Alliance partners. Of the 33 MCA candidates, only 13 were returned (as compared to 27 in 1964). Many of the MCA top-ranking leaders were defeated. These included Dr. Lim Swee Aun, deputy president of the MCA and Minister of Commerce and Industries, Dr. Ng Kam Poh,

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52. Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia, Election Manifesto: 3rd General Elections, 1969.

Minister of Social Welfare, and Mr. Kam Woon Wah, MCA's Secretary-General. Those MCA candidates who were returned had their majorities drastically reduced. Once again, MCA candidates won only in constituencies with a significant Malay vote, and fared badly in areas with a predominantly Chinese electorate and a small number of Malay electors (Vasil, 1972:103-5).

In the State election the Alliance fate was equally bad. It secured only 162 out of a total of 282 seats and 47.95% of the votes. In 1959 and 1964 it had won 206 (55.5%) and 241 (57.6%) seats respectively. The most serious losses of the Alliance were in Penang, Perak and Selangor, where non-Malays outnumbered the Malays. In these states, the MCA was almost completely demolished. In Penang, the Alliance suffered a crushing defeat and captured only 4 out of 24 seats. The MCA was not able to win a single seat. In both Perak and Selangor, the Alliance was deprived of a majority in the State Legislatures, winning 19 (out of 40) and 14 (out of 28) seats respectively. None of the MCA candidates in Perak was successful and only one in Selangor secured a seat (Vasil, 1972:36-37). The MCA also suffered reverses in other states like Negri Sembilan and Malacca, but less severe compared to Penang, Perak and Selangor.

The election results showed clearly that the Chinese partner in the Alliance, the MCA, had lost the support of the majority of the Chinese. The bulk of the Chinese had turned their support to the two new parties, the DAP and the



Gerakan, and the PPP. All the three parties were multi-racial in membership and all had done well in urban constituencies with a large non-Malay electorate.<sup>53</sup> The DAP provided the major opposition in Perak, Negri Sembilan and Malacca, the Gerakan in Penang and the PPP in Perak. In Selangor, both DAP and Gerakan were strong. The success of the DAP was largely due to its effective use of the 'Malaysian Malaysia' slogan, while the Gerakan success was mainly the result of its non-communal posture, its close links with trade unions and the personal appeals of several of its leaders (Vasil, 1972:43-44).

The heavy losses suffered by the Alliance were due partly to the absence of a national issue such as 'confrontation' which had helped in 1964. Other factors certainly made their contributions too. The Chinese and Indians felt that the Alliance party's policy excessively favoured the Malays while to the Malays the policy did not seem to get results fast enough. Consequently, many Malays and non-Malays alike became disenchanted with the party. Another factor that worked against the party was the electoral pact among the opposition parties which had effectively avoided the dispersion of opposition votes and forced the Alliance to face straight fights (Vasil, 1972:43).

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53. Together these three parties captured 25 seats in the Parliament: DAP-13, Gerakan-8 and PPP-4.

At least three important facts stood out after the election results were announced - all of which are related to Chinese politics. First, there were doubts over the Alliance claim that it represented the three communities in the country through its constituent members - the UMNO, MCA and MIC. The position of the UMNO which claimed to represent the Malays was seriously threatened by the more extreme PMIP. The latter managed to capture 23.8% of the total Parliamentary votes. Considering that the Malays accounted for 56% of the total electorate and the PMIP drew its support exclusively from the Malays the success of the PMIP was very significant (Vasil, 1972:46).

The performance of the MCA and MIC was even more disheartening. The MCA went into the campaign with 27 Parliamentary seats and came out with only 13. More importantly, in 9 of the 13 constituencies captured by the MCA the Malay electors accounted for more than 30% of the total electorate. In the State elections, only 26 of its 80 candidates were successful. Thus there was no longer any basis for the MCA to claim that it represented the Chinese.<sup>54</sup>

The second important fact was the political defeat for the Malayan Communist Party and its sympathizers. The MCP was officially banned in Malaysia, but throughout the election campaign its supporters (mostly in the Labour Party) urged

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54. The MIC also faced the same problem as the MCA. It won 2 Parliamentary and 3 State seats.

the people to boycott the election. The Labour Party, which was dominated by extreme left-wingers, had acted as MCP's spokesman (Vasil, 1972:47). It decided in December 1968 not to contest the election and to call for a boycott. Earlier, in 1967, the party had passed a motion calling on members to abandon constitutional politics and seek 'a mass struggle as expounded by Mao Tse-Tung' (Drummond & Hawkins, 1970:320). However, the attempt of the MCP and its supporters in the Labour Party was unsuccessful. The majority of the electorate simply ignored the call and the overall turnout was about 70% (Ratnam & Milne, 1970:210-1). This was clearly the defeat of the MCP and the Labour Party.

Thirdly, a serious challenge was posed to the inter-communal Alliance monopoly of political power. A detailed analysis of the election results showed clearly vast numbers of Malaysians had rejected the Alliance inter-communal structure based on co-operation between a handful of Chinese businessmen of the MCA on the one hand and the Malay elites on the other.<sup>55</sup> If the drain of votes from Alliance continues, the whole raison d'etre of the Alliance could be undermined.

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55. The Alliance suffered from 'an erosion of both the communal and the anti-communal vote'. For the first time in Malaysian history, a non-communal party had secured the control of a state. Its share of the total vote fell from almost 80% in 1955 to about 52% in 1959 and 48% in 1969. The 1964 election result was an exception to the generally declining pattern of Alliance strength. The Alliance then was able to secure 59% of the vote because important national issues like 'confrontation' mitigated the effects of the increasing dissatisfaction of the Chinese and Malays with the party. Cf. Ratnam & Milne, (1970:224-6), Vasil (1972:47-48), Gray (1969:15, 18).

The Impact of May 13 Communal Disturbance

The outcome of the 1969 election came as a great surprise to observers who had predicted another Alliance sweep. The reverses of the Alliance party must have shocked many, especially the Alliance leaders themselves. In retrospect, the election results might not have been the cause of the race riots that broke out on May 13 in Kuala Lumpur but at least it provided the occasion for the disturbances to take place. The May 13 communal disturbance has had a great impact on the political system of Malaysia as well as the politics of the Malaysian Chinese. Two days after the disturbance broke out, a state of national Emergency was declared, followed by the suspension of the Constitution and Parliament. An eight-man National Operations Council (NOC) headed by Tun Razak, the then Deputy Prime Minister, was set up to rule by decree.

The Malay-controlled NOC ruled the country until February 1971, when Parliament was finally reinstated. But the restored Parliament was a much weakened one. Its powers and privileges were severely restricted. One of the first acts of the new Parliament was to pass a Constitutional amendment prohibiting political activity of a communal character. Under the amendment, it was a seditious offence to discuss both inside and outside the Parliament constitutional provisions relating to the special position of the Malays, the status of the sultans, the National Language and

citizenship. Thus, with the proscription of these salient political issues, democracy in Malaysia has been severely constrained. It can now hardly approximate the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy which had existed since Independence until the outbreak of the riots in May, 1969 (Mehmet, 1971:215).

Since the issues removed from public discussion are issues which centred around the privileges of the Malays, there seems to be little doubt that the Constitutional Amendments aimed more at protecting the Malays than the non-Malays. It is not possible for non-Malay opposition parties to talk about 'non-communalism' and 'equality for all' without touching the fundamental questions of citizenship and Malay privileges and other related issues. Now that the discussion of these issues has been prohibited, it has the net effect of restricting non-Malay political activities rather than those of the Malays. The non-Malays, especially the Chinese, are finding it increasingly difficult to participate effectively in the political process. The May riots and the subsequent constitutional change have seriously impaired their faith in the political and legal processes of the country. Many have come to realize to their despair that parliamentary democracy is phoney and that what they have gained through the ballot box in the 1969 election has been robbed away from them as a result of the riots (Vasil, 1971:313).

### The Chinese Unity Movement

Apart from resulting in a constitutional amendment which effectively constrained the hitherto parliamentary democracy based on the Westminster model, the race riots also induced a drastic change in government policies. A new economic programme was drawn up, which in effect favoured the Malay community more than the non-Malays. Militarily, the plan to expand the armed forces was also accelerated. The Royal Malay Regiment (exclusively Malays) has been expanded from ten to thirteen battalions ostensibly for the purpose of dealing with an increased communist threat on the Malaysia-Thai border. A system of work permits was implemented, which not only barred many permanent residents from employment but also resulted in the verification of citizenship under Article 30 of the Constitution.<sup>56</sup> Further, on the contentious issue of education, Malay was made by decree the sole medium of instruction starting with the first year of all primary schools in 1970.

All these discriminatory measures, taken together, had the effect of generating fears, anxieties, frustration and a sense of insecurity among the non-Malay communities. To add to these, the then Deputy Prime Minister, Tun Ismail made a statement in January 1971 that 'it would be better for UMNO to break with the MCA and MIC if the two Alliance partners continue to be neither dead nor alive'. The MCA leader,

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56. Many Chinese had obtained citizenship under Article 30 of the Constitution. They feared that their citizenship would be revoked after surrendering the citizenship documents to the government for 'verification'.

Tan Siew Sin reacted by saying that 'if there was a feeling in UMNO that it could do without the MCA, it would be far better for the MCA to be out of the Alliance and operate under our own banner'.<sup>57</sup>

It was against this background of fear and insecurity and the indignation suffered by the MCA that in February, 1971 some Chinese leaders, led by Alex Lee, felt the need to promote solidarity among the Chinese, and launched the Chinese unity movement.<sup>58</sup>

The Chinese unity movement was first started in Kuala Lumpur on February 7, 1971. The meeting was a historical one for the Chinese, for it was on that day that the Chinese awoke to the need to unite, and it was also on that day that Tan Siew Sin, president of the MCA offered to step down and 'retire from politics altogether' if he was considered 'a barrier to Chinese unity'.<sup>59</sup>

The meeting resulted in the birth of the Chinese Liaison Committee for National Unity and a six-point declaration, which among other things, urged that 'the Malaysian Chinese must unite in order to make an effective contribution to and

57. Quoted in "A Reflection", a mimeographed copy circulated by the Perak MCA Reformation Group (n.d.)

58. The unity movement was organized by non-MCA leadership. The organizer, Alex Lee made it clear in the meeting: "Though the MCA president Tan Siew Sin has been invited to attend, I would like to clear any misunderstanding about the gathering being an MCA meeting. We are not committing anybody to the MCA".

59. Quoted in The China Press, Feb.8, 1971. Also quoted in the Guardian (organ of the MCA), May, 1971, p.2. Tan Siew Sin was invited to address the meeting.

consolidate national unity'. The declaration also pledged the 'undivided loyalty' and the 'absolute allegiance' of the Chinese to the country, to 'uphold the Constitution' and to co-operate with other Malaysians 'for the furtherance of equal opportunities in the economic, social and political advancement of all Malaysians in a democratic and just society' (The Guardian, May, 1971:1).

In order to allay Malay fears and distrust in the movement, the organizers were careful to stress that the ultimate aim of Chinese unity was to co-operate effectively with other communities, especially the Malays, so as to achieve national unity, progress and prosperity. Tan Siew Sin who was invited to speak made this point very clearly:

I want Chinese unity not for the purpose of promoting Chinese chauvinism, not for the purpose of confronting the Malays or any other community, but for co-operating effectively with them, because a completely disunited Chinese community is not only of no use to itself, it is of no use to the other communities or even to Malaysia. It promotes political instability and it does not benefit any one except those who are out to make mischief.

(The Guardian, May, 1971:2).

The Kuala Lumpur meeting proved a great success and aroused great enthusiasm among the Chinese throughout the country. Less than two weeks later, on February 18, a similar meeting was held in Ipoh. According to press reports, the good response from the Chinese community was unprecedented. The audience included Chinese of all walks



of life, especially shopkeepers, hawkers and workers (Kin Kuok Daily News, Feb.19, 1971). A similar rally was also held in Seremban a month later. A fourth and the last rally was held in Penang.<sup>60</sup>

Judging from the enthusiastic response of the Chinese community and the seriousness of the leaders of the movement, one would expect that the unity movement would become a rallying point for the Chinese and eventually unite them as a strong political force. Some observers even believed that the unity movement might eventually replace the badly defeated (in the 1969 General election) MCA. But, to the disappointment of many ordinary Chinese who had placed great hope in the movement as a unifying force, the unity movement was short-lived. It ended in Penang, where it held its last meeting, after less than three months of its formation.

The death of the unity movement was the result of interference from the MCA 'old guards' who still control key positions in the state branches and at headquarters. Tan Siew Sin, himself an 'old guard', was invited to address the unity meetings, probably because of his position as the MCA president and as Finance Minister of the country and also because of his cordial relationship with the UMNO leaders. In the course of his speech, Tan Siew Sin admitted MCA's

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60. The Penang meeting, in contrast with the first three meetings, was sponsored by the MCA.

past mistakes and even offered to step down as MCA president if the Chinese community so wished. The leaders of the unity movement appreciated Tan's sincerity in admitting his past mistakes, and his desire to get to the root of Chinese problems. A pledge was thus made by the movement to the effect that the Chinese would follow his leadership, as he had admitted his past mistakes. The Chinese were obviously prepared to give him another chance to redeem himself as the leader of the Chinese community. But the tremendous response and enthusiasm shown by the Chinese in Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh and Seremban worried the other MCA 'old guards' such as Lee San Choon and Kam Woon Wah. These 'old guards' feared that the unity movement might eventually destroy the MCA (and hence their own positions and vested interests) since it urged Chinese unity but not under the leadership of the MCA. As a measure of 'self-preservation', the old guards tried to pack the meeting with MCA youths and hard-cores. Their intention was presumably to take over the movement, and unite the Chinese under the banner of the MCA. In this they failed, as was clear from their effort to organize the fourth and the last unity meeting in Penang. In contrast with the first three unity meetings, the MCA-sponsored Penang rally attracted only a small crowd, and these being 'hardcore MCA types brought to the meeting in 33 buses'<sup>61</sup> Nonetheless, the old guards had at least succeeded in sabotaging the unity movement.

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61. "A Reflection", a mimeographed copy circulated by the Perak MCA Reformation Group (n.d.).

Tan Siew Sin's tactical error also helped in the intensification of the old guard sabotage. At the time when the unity movement was being organized throughout the country, Tan Siew Sin began re-organizing his MCA, in an attempt to absorb young intellectuals and professional men into its leadership rank. This move frightened the old guards in the party. Fearing that their position would be jeopardized, they quickly closed ranks and proceeded to sabotage both the unity movement as well as the MCA re-organization (Pillai, 1971:14).

The strength and influence of the MCA old guards and their opposition to the unity movement and the MCA reform programme certainly worried Tan Siew Sin. He might have sensed that it was safer for him to be on the side of the old guards. This attitude of his and his distrust in the unity movement began to reveal barely two months after the inaugural meeting of the unity movement, when Alex Lee, with the support of Chinese guilds and associations, attempted to register the Chinese Liaison Committee for National Unity.<sup>62</sup> Tan Siew Sin warned:

The move to register the Chinese Unity Movement... could cause confusion among the Chinese and led to disunity rather than unity. Equally important it could create suspicion in the minds of other communities particularly the Malays.

(Quoted in "A Reflection").

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62. The application for registration of the unity movement was later rejected by the Registrar of Societies on 7.1.1972. See Kwong Wah Jit Poh, February 12, 1972.

Later, at the Penang Unity rally, Tan Siew Sin again voiced his opposition to the registration of the Chinese unity movement as a political party.

If it is not registered as a political party under the Societies Act, the Malaysian Chinese Liaison Committee for National Unity cannot function as it is doing now - that is promote Chinese unity which is essentially a political objective... If the registration created a new political party, the Chinese would be represented not by six but seven political parties.

(Straits Times, April 26, 1971).

There was surprisingly a complete change of Tan Siew Sin's mental attitude within a period of less than three months.

At the first unity rally at Kuala Lumpur, Tan Siew Sin's attitude was 'Chinese unite and choose your leader'. He said:

If it is the feeling of the Chinese community that I should withdraw (as MCA President), I am prepared to throw my support to anyone or any group which can attract sufficient support to be able to claim that he or they can genuinely represent and speak in the name of the Chinese community. It is for the Chinese community to decide whom they want and I am prepared to bow to their wishes.

(The Guardian, May, 1971:2).

Within a short period, his stand seems to be: 'Chinese unite under the MCA only':

We want this unity in order to get a square deal. To get a square deal, however, one must be in the government or be close to the government... The other point which we must not forget is that ... we must be able to co-operate with the other communities, especially the Malays.

(Straits Times, April 26, 1971).

The message was clear. The MCA was a part of the ruling Alliance party. And it was the MCA which was able to co-operate with the Malays through the UMNO, the senior partner in the Alliance. The Chinese should therefore unite under the MCA banner. This change of attitude on the part of Tan Siew Sin who was earlier regarded by the unity movement as the 'supreme leader of the Chinese community' was disappointing to the Chinese and nipped the unity movement in the bud.

The Chinese unity movement with its initial success had raised the hopes of the Chinese that for once solidarity among the Chinese which had been so lacking was in sight. But these hopes were short-lived. They were shattered within a matter of three months, all because of the presence of a small group of powerful and influential individuals within the community who had vested interests in the status quo. Perhaps the frustration within the community at large over the failure of the unity movement could best be represented by the reactions of a respected Chinese school teacher:

There would come a time when our grand-children  
and their grand-children after them will spit  
at the graves of those so-called leaders who  
smashed the Unity Movement. (Pillai, 1971:14)

Contrary to expectations, the UMNO, Alliance dominant partner, did not seem to put any pressure on the movement, even though its leader, Tun Razak, was 'totally against' any

racial unity movement be it Malay or Chinese, because 'it is negative, as a movement born out of fears is negative'. However, Tun Razak was in favour of Chinese unity under the MCA banner.

The Chinese unity under the MCA banner is relevant to Malaysia because its achievement is geared to objectives beneficial to the community and the country.<sup>63</sup>

### The Political Disunity of the Chinese

The collapse of the Chinese unity movement is an indication that political disunity and diversity remain to be a feature of the Chinese community. Even the Chinese themselves agree to the description to equate them with 'a pan of loose sands'. This feature is the result of a combination of several factors. Three of these factors - dialect divisions, different media of education and birth place - have been mentioned in chapter 1. A fourth factor is *related to the traditional Chinese political philosophy that government and politics is something out of reach of the ordinary folk and it is best to have as little to do with it as possible. This indifferent attitude towards politics is reinforced by the Chinese philosophy of 'minding one's own business' - to sweep the snow in front of one's own doorstep; mind not the snow over other people's roof top, as the Chinese put it.*

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63. Quoted in The Guardian, September, 1971, p.9. The 'objectives' he referred to was the successful implementation of the New Economic Policy under the Second Malaysia Plan.

Another factor is the absence of a Chinese national organization which encompasses Chinese of all walks of life. This results in the Chinese not voting as a solid bloc. The Chambers of Commerce and Assembly Halls are influential, but they can do no more than act as pressure groups and their influence is usually confined to individual states. The Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce, though a national body, is essentially concerned with commercial interests of the community and its political role is limited.

Finally, as indicated earlier, the role played by the small vested interests group within the MCA should not be overlooked. This group has been described by some as 'the babas in the Ali-baba (Malay-Chinese) partnership - the compradores who link up with the administrators to make money'. This group is not in favour of Chinese unity for fear of its own position being undermined. It was this group which sabotaged the Chinese attempt to unite themselves. It was this very same group that prevented the MCA from successfully reforming itself (Pillai, 1971:14).

In a plural society like Malaysia, it is not uncommon to find political parties having special appeals to certain communities. There are political parties which especially attract the Chinese just as there are those which appeal more to the Malays. If the number of political parties representing the Chinese is any indication of their political disunity, then obviously the Chinese are politically disunited. There

are, at present, five main parties whose supporters are largely Chinese. The presence of these parties is the result of Chinese disunity rather than its cause, and it has the effect of rendering the Chinese ineffective as a political force.

The political disunity of the Chinese is also evident from the numerous party in-fightings that have occurred within the MCA, the DAP and the Gerakan. The first upheaval of the MCA occurred in 1955, when a 'young blood' leader, Ong Yoke Lin, defeated H.S. Lee who was described as 'unchallengeable' and 'undisputed leader' in Selangor, as Chairman of Selangor MCA.<sup>64</sup>

The second upheaval took place in 1958 when Tan Cheng-lock, Ong Yoke Lin, Tan Siew Sin and T.H. Tan faced the challenge of Lim Chong Eu and his associates. In the struggle, the second 'unchallengeable' man Tan Cheng-lock was toppled by Lim Chong Eu.

The most recent split within the MCA started in 1971, when the party attempted a re-organization. The position of the 'old guards' was being challenged by the 'young Turks', who dominated the reformation movement. In the event, Tan Siew Sin, a third 'unchallengeable' man, was being challenged. Sensing the wind of change just before the party's General Assembly due to be held in August 1973, Tan Siew Sin and his close associates were quick to act. The 'young Turk' leaders

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64. MCA Reformation News Bulletin, "The MCA Unchallengeable Men 1949-1973", mimeographed, (n.d.).



and many of their supporters were expelled from the party.<sup>65</sup> Perak, the state where the MCA Reformation movement began, and understandably the base of the reformist group, was most severely hit by Tan Siew Sin's expulsion orders. As a result of such elimination, the reformists in Perak were crippled. Many leaders who would have been nominated to contest the various top party posts in the Central Working Committee had been sacked and deprived of the opportunity.

Apart from mass expulsion, it was claimed that the old guard leaders had rigged membership, by back-dating their supporters while freezing members supporting the reformist group. Some MCA branches supporting the reformation had even been dissolved or suspended.<sup>66.</sup>

The old guard leaders, because of their superior position in the party, were able to eliminate most of their opponents in the reformation movement by various means.<sup>67</sup> The election results of the 1973 MCA Central Working Committee showed beyond doubt that the party was still controlled by the old guard. Tan Siew Sin and almost all of his close

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- 65. Those prominent leaders expelled from the party included Lim Keng Yaik (former Minister with Special Functions and Chairman of the Perak MCA Liaison Committee), Tan Tiong Hong, Alex Lee, Teh Siew Eng, Yong Su Hian, Paul Leong and Choon Tien Chuan. Cf. Straits Times, April 27, 1972 and June 2, 1973, and The Star, April 27, 1972.
  - 66. It is not known how many MCA members had been expelled throughout the country. In Perak alone, it was claimed by the reformist group that almost 200 had been expelled.
  - 67. The old guard leaders were even able to influence the government to impose a clamp on the press on June 7, 1973, thus effectively stopped the publication of all news about the reformation movement.

associates were returned, many of them unopposed.<sup>68</sup> But the crisis of the MCA is by no means over. It is understood that the reformation group is still active in gathering the support of the grass-roots, which had been largely alienated by the MCA old guard leadership.

The split within the DAP - the Chinese-based opposition party that captured the largest number of parliamentary seats (a total of 13 in 1969) - came to the surface some time in June, 1972. It resulted in the resignation of two of the party's most powerful men.<sup>69</sup> The immediate cause of the resignation by the two leaders was the decision of the party's Central Executive Committee to suspend them 'for flouting party policy and for activities detrimental to party discipline and morale' (Straits Times, June 20, 1972).

But the real reason behind the split, especially that between the party Secretary-General, Lim Kit Siang and vice-chairman Goh Hock Guan was believed to be related to the personality clashes between the two leaders. It might also partly be the result of the unsuccessful MCA-DAP secret talks

68. Among those returned unopposed were Tan Siew Sin (President), Lee San Choon (Deputy president), Lee Siok Yew, Kam Woon Wah, and Wong Seng Chow, the last three as vice-presidents. It should be noted that those young Turks who intended to oppose these old guards had all been expelled from the party. See The Sunday Times, August 12, 1973.

69. They were Goh Hock Guan and A. Soorian, both vice-chairmen of the party, and M.P's at the time of their resignation. Goh was earlier the party's Secretary-General but resigned from the post after the events of May, 1969, when he left the country. He was made one of the party's vice-chairmen on his return to Malaysia.

for an eventual merger of the two parties shortly after the collapse of the unity movement (The Malayan Thung Pau, July 9, 1972; Straits Times, June 20, June 21, 1972). Whatever the reasons, the split has greatly weakened the DAP in particular and the political strength of the Chinese in general.

The Gerakan, the only non-communal party that captured a State in the 1969 election could not escape from the fate of party in-fighting either. The result has been the formation of a new party - Pekemas (Social Justice Party) by a faction led by Dr. Tan Chee Khoon. Lim Chong Eu remains in the leadership of the Gerakan which, after the split, had its strength greatly reduced. Under the circumstances, the position of Gerakan in the Penang State Legislature became precarious and it had to co-operate with the Alliance to form a coalition government in the state.

#### New Political Leadership

One significant feature of post-war Chinese politics is the emergence of a new type of political leadership. Before the Pacific War, the elites of the Chinese community were drawn largely from the merchant class. These leaders were either affluent or in command of community organizations, or both. This situation changed after the war, more conspicuously after Malaya's Independence. Political leaders are no longer drawn exclusively from the merchant and business class. This is particularly true in the case of Chinese opposition parties. Many of the DAP, Gerakan and Pekemas leaders are young

intellectuals and professional people such as lawyers, doctors and lecturers. Even the MCA which used to be dominated by the conservative Chinese businessmen, has sensed the wind of change and attempted to recruit into its leadership hierarchy 'new blood' consisting largely of professional people.<sup>70</sup>

A distinctive feature of these new leaders is their Malaysian orientation. They are in sharp contrast with their pre-war counterparts, whose main concern was to establish links with China. Almost all the newly emerged leaders were born locally. Their outlook is essentially Malaysian and their main concern is to strive for equality for all communities under the Malaysian sun. Very few of them seem to be attracted by communal politics, although some of these men are inclined to seek security for their own community.

The emergence of this new type of political leadership based on education has been largely the result of the availability of more educational opportunities and better facilities - in short, the policy of universal education. It is also due to the country's democratic system which calls on all its citizens to participate in the choice of the government as well as the opposition. These two features are still acting vigorously on the Chinese status hierarchy dominated by the educated few. It is likely that their long term effect may be to transform the hierarchy (Wang, 1965:185-6).

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70. It should be noted that on the whole the MCA is still controlled by a small group of rich and influential businessmen, with vested interests, in the party.

### The Political Strength of the Chinese

Several main themes have emerged from the politics of the Chinese in Malaysia. Overall, there has been a genuine effort on the part of the Chinese to achieve inter-communal co-operation which will be dealt with shortly. The second main theme is the increased political consciousness of the Chinese masses. This is clearly indicated by the increase over the years in the number of Chinese electors, election candidates, the rise of various Chinese political parties with their subsequent in-fighting, and the enthusiasm shown in the unity movement.

The third theme, which has partly rendered the Chinese ineffective as a political force, is the ever-present political diversity and disunity. This feature of disunity has resulted in the emergence of various political parties shredding the Chinese support which in turn further divided the community and weakened its political strength.

However, some powerful external forces have also been at work to weaken the political strength of the Chinese community. One of these forces, the race riots, with the resultant constrained democracy and its effect on restricting the Chinese political activities, had been indicated earlier. Another powerful force has been the electoral manipulations carried out by the Malay-dominated Alliance Government. This measure has systematically victimised the Chinese (and Indians) by

reducing their political power at local, state and national levels. In 1962, the Malay-dominated Parliament passed a constitutional amendment to cancel the 1960 delimitation of parliamentary and state constituencies report, and adopted new procedures for the determination of constituency boundaries. These new procedures favoured the rural areas by giving them a substantially greater weightage than was provided in the 1960 delimitation (Ratnam & Milne, 1967:65). The net result of this has been to reduce the size of rural constituency to half that of urban constituency. Since the Malays are overwhelmingly rural dwellers and the Chinese largely urban this means that the voting strength of the Malays is being doubled while that of the Chinese reduced by half.<sup>71</sup> This gerrymandering was obviously aimed at ensuring continued Malay pre-eminence at the national and state level of electoral politics at the expense of the Chinese (Rabushka & Shepsle, 1971:473-4).

At the local election, the Chinese have also been victimized. The Chinese have been in control of many of the town and municipal councils such as those in Ipoh, Penang, Malacca and Seremban. In 1965 these Municipal Councils, with the exception of Ipoh, were suspended by the government on alleged charges of malpractice and corruption. This effectively removed the Chinese from the political control of municipalities, which they had won in fair elections. The

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71. For example, in the 1964 election, the electorate ranged from 58,000 (Bungsar - urban and predominantly Chinese) to 17,750 (Ulu Selangor - rural and predominantly Malay) in Selangor, and in Perak, Menglembu, a predominantly Chinese constituency, had an electorate of 46,000 while Hilir Perak, a Malay area, had only 15,800. Cf. Ratnam & Milne, (1967:66).

government also set up a Royal Commission Enquiry on local government resulting in the abolition of local elections in which non-Malays form the majority of the electors (Rabushka & Shepsle, 1972:127). In Kuala Lumpur, to prevent the possibility of the Chinese running the Municipal Council, Parliament decided in 1961 to replace elective councillors with an appointed Commissioner and an advisory staff (Rabushka, 1970:356).

### Inter-communal Co-operation

It will be remembered that inter-communal co-operation in politics dates as far back as the Larut Wars in Perak when Chinese secret societies were rare. Later, it was attempted in the form of AMCJA-PUTERA coalition in the fight against the Federation Proposals. When the first local elections were introduced in 1952, Sino-Malay co-operation was again attempted in the form of MCA-UMNO electoral alliance which became the predecessor of the present UMNO-MCA-MIC Alliance Party. On Malayan Independence day the Socialist Front - which was a coalition between a Chinese left-wing party and a Malay left-wing party - was inaugurated.

Whatever the real motives behind these inter-communal coalitions, the leaders involved must have realized the importance of co-operation between the various communities, in particular between the Malays and the Chinese, if they wished to achieve anything substantial. This realization of the importance of inter-communal co-operation in politics is not only evident in the left-wing and right-wing coalitions, it has also been obvious in many other largely Chinese

political organizations. The Gerakan, for example, recognized the need to place 'special attention and emphasis on the economically weak Malays ...' and that they should be 'protected from exploitation and assisted to compete with other communities on a just basis in business, trade and the professions'.<sup>72</sup> The DAP, commonly regarded by the Malays as a Chinese communal party, was also keen to attract the support of the Malays.<sup>73</sup> Even the MCP, which was almost entirely Chinese, recognized the need to have support from other communities. In February 1949, merely a few months after the outbreak of the armed revolt, the insurgent army of the MCP was changed from the Malayan People's Anti-British Army (MPABA) to the Malayan Races Liberation Army (MRLA) in the hope that some Malays and Indians would be induced to join the insurgence (O'Ballance, 1966:89).

It is interesting to note a recurrent pattern in inter-communal co-operation in the form of coalitions: it has always been threatened by communal issues. When these communal issues become salient, inter-communal co-operation becomes unstable. This had been the fate of the AMCJA-PUTERA coalition and the Socialist Front. Both organizations collapsed largely because of disagreement over communal issues.

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72. Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia: Policy Statement, 15 April, 1968.

73. Interview with the DAP Secretary-General, Lim Kit Siang, November, 1973.



The Alliance Party, too, is not without its internal problems. These problems have also been largely related to communal issues affecting its component parts. The crisis of 1959, for example, almost threatened to break up the Alliance, had not the moderates within the MCA reasserted themselves and forced the more extreme elements to withdraw. Over the years, the UMNO has assumed a dominant role within the Alliance. So far the three partners are able to reach compromises over most issues. Apart from the 1959 crisis, there have not been any insurmountable problems. The political compromise of the Alliance will presumably go on working in the foreseeable future as long as the two constituent partners that represent the non-Malays are willing to continue accepting their subservient roles.

Since the 1969 General election and the subsequent communal disturbance, there has been increasing need for inter-communal co-operation in Malaysia. Recognizing this, state coalition governments had been formed in Penang and Perak, the former between the Gerakan and the Alliance while the latter between the PPP and the Alliance. But the most recent and spectacular political development was the formation in January 1973 of the National Front Government - the Grand Alliance. By far the broadest coalition in Asian history, the Grand Alliance includes the Alliance Party, the Party Islam, the Gerakan and SUPP (Sarawak United People's Party), the last three used to be opposition parties (Pillai, 1973:18).

This latest development marked the beginning of a new political era in the country and left the Opposition with only 22 parliamentary seats out of 144, representing the DAP, Pekemas, PPP and SNAP (Sarawak National Party). Tun Razak, the Prime Minister, speaking in connection with the National Front Government, felt that active politicking in a multi-racial society could exacerbate racial tensions unnecessarily, and the National Front government would forestall such a development. The National Front, according to Razak, was in keeping with the interests and wishes of the majority of the people and to strengthen the foundation of national unity (Sunday Times, August 12, 1973).

It is hard to predict the impact of this large-scale coalition on the future political development of the country. Hopefully, the various parties would cease to have as much interest as before in winning support through communal or merely political appeals. And this in turn would give politics a more developmental focus (Stockwin, 1973:9).

One thing, however, is clear. The MCA is no longer the only Chinese-based party in the new political structure. The Alliance' close co-operation with the Gerakan leader, Lim Chong Eu and the SUPP (whose leader Dato Ong Kee Hui was made a Cabinet Minister) might to some extent be an indication of the UMNO's doubt over the MCA's ability to carry the Chinese community in any crisis of confidence. The formation of the Grand Alliance also shows that the UMNO-MCA-MIC Alliance

is no longer a permanent feature. When need arose, as it did, new partners would be recruited in an attempt to strengthen the party.

The Grand Alliance also marks the blurring of divisions between the major coalition partners, the UMNO and the Party Islam. This UMNO-Party Islam co-operation has been interpreted by the Chinese as an important step toward the political unification of the Malays, as indeed it is. For with this latest move, there is no longer any Malay opposition party being represented in the Parliament. Consequently, there has been on the part of the Chinese community a revival of the idea of Chinese unity in a new form. This is the speculation with respect to the possible tripartite MCA-Gerakan-SUPP co-operation. A fourth party, the PPP has also been implicated in the co-operation. Until now, however, nothing has yet materialized.<sup>74</sup> If this non-Malay (which is essentially Chinese) political co-operation eventually comes into being, it will then add a new dimension to Malaysian politics.

### Conclusion

The main political problem of the Chinese community seems to lie in its disunity. This has been manifested in the

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74. The talks appear to have reached a stalemate. It is believed that the MCA does not accept the suggestion by the Gerakan and SUPP that all the three parties should dissolve themselves and form a new one.

number of Chinese-based political organizations, and the frequent infightings and internal dissension that confront them. Over the years, however, there has been a marked increase in the political awareness of the community. There has also been a genuine effort on the part of the community towards Sino-Malay co-operation in politics. This, together with political awareness, augurs well for the Chinese community.

However, the Malays have been constantly keeping an watchful eye on the political activities of the Chinese. They are determined to maintain their political supremacy and are prepared to use whatever measure is necessary to curb Chinese political activities and weaken their political strength. This has been clearly shown by their electoral manipulations at national, state and local levels in the 1960's. The manner in which the 1959 Alliance crisis was resolved was another indication that the Malays were not yet prepared to give any major political concessions to the Chinese in a way that would threaten their own position. More recently, the constitutional change as a result of the Kuala Lumpur race riots directed more at restricting the political activities of the opposition which is largely Chinese, while the riot itself is thought to have been an attempt to stem a Chinese challenge to Malay political supremacy.

Thus, despite the attempt of the Chinese to secure Sino-Malay co-operation in politics, Chinese participation in politics remains a conflict-generating force in Malaysia. Chinese involvement in the clandestine MCP, their claim for

increased political power, and their demand for a rightful place for the Chinese language and education in the national education system all serve to arouse fear among the Malays and hence become constant sources of conflict. It is to this last aspect, namely Chinese education and language, that we turn in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### CHINESE EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA

#### Introduction

Overseas Chinese education has generally been regarded as a vital force in developing and perpetuating 'Chinese identity' and hence an obstacle to the assimilation of the Overseas Chinese into the indigenous population. Purcell (1965:37), for example, has suggested that

the partiality of so many overseas Chinese for education through the medium of the Chinese language can be said to be the greatest barrier to the assimilation of the overseas Chinese into the communities of the Southeast Asian countries, and has been the occasion of political action among the local nationalist parties to check and off-set it.,

In Thailand, Skinner (1957:381) has also noted the important role played by Chinese education in preserving 'Chineseness' among the Chinese immigrants. He suggested that

without a Chinese education, grandchildren of Chinese immigrants at the present time become Thai.

In Malaysia, the role of Chinese education in preserving and perpetuating 'Chinese identity' is beyond any shadow of doubt. In fact, the prevalence of Chinese schools, coupled with the exceptionally strong numerical strength of the Chinese,

makes 'integration' a problem of the first magnitude. The term 'assimilation' becomes scarcely a relevant word to use.

In Malaysia, more than elsewhere in Southeast Asia, Chinese education has sparked off controversies and has become politically salient for years. Almost invariably the question of Chinese education and its Siamese twin, language, constitutes an integral part of the larger education-language issue. There has not been an education controversy in Malaysia without involving Chinese education and language. Moore (1960: 195-6) even went so far as to say that

The Chinese education issue encompasses almost the entire range of the political and social cleavages behind the entire communal struggle in Malaya, and it is for this reason that what might in another context be considered a subject of relatively minor importance, assumed major significance in post-merdeka Malaya. It comprehended cleavages within the Chinese community as well as between the Chinese and Malays.

There is little doubt that in Malaysia, as in other plural societies, education has been one of the leading factors in communalism. There always have been differences of opinion between the Chinese and the Malays over the education policy. Before 1971 the controversy was especially centred around the question of the National Language. The Malays felt that the Malay language should be made the National and the sole official language of the country. The Chinese and the Indians too, while accepting Malay as the National Language,

advocated multi-lingualism and that the Chinese language and Tamil should at least be given official status. Now that Malay has been proclaimed constitutionally as the National Language, and the official ban on the discussion of the language issue imposed, the education-language issue is seldom raised publicly. But the Chinese are far from satisfied with the position of their language. They feel that the government's intention is to slowly destroy Chinese education and language.

#### A Brief History of Chinese Education

Chinese education has had a chequered history in Malaysia. Its phenomenal growth began at the turn of the twentieth century. The growth was accelerated by the Revolution and the Kuo-Yu movement in China in 1911 and 1917 respectively. Both of these events led to an upsurge of enthusiasm for Chinese education; Chinese schools were rapidly set up throughout Malaysia. By 1937 there were already about 933 Chinese schools with 79,993 pupils (Mills, 1942:366). Since then, there had been a steady increase of Chinese schools and their enrolment, reaching its peak, in the case of secondary schools, in 1961, and in the case of primary schools, in 1959. In 1961, there were a total of 132 Chinese secondary schools and 1,274 Chinese primary schools (1,311 in 1959). Since 1962, the number of Chinese schools has been declining. This was particularly true of Chinese secondary schools. By 1971, there were only 40 Chinese secondary schools with a total enrolment of 17,574 (as compared to 55,741 in 1961). On the primary level, the number of schools was 1,021 - 291



less as compared to the 1959 figure.<sup>1</sup> But the Chinese primary school enrolment has slightly increased over the years, owing mainly to an increase in Chinese children of school-going age.

The sharp decrease in the number of Chinese secondary schools since 1962 was largely due to the fact that many of them accepted government's terms and became fully-assisted national-type secondary schools where the medium of instruction was to become English. Most of these converted schools, however, still offer Chinese as an academic subject whenever there is a demand for it.

Another important reason for the decline of Chinese schools and pupils was purely economic. The diplomas or certificates issued by the Chinese schools have never been recognized by any official institution. Chinese school leavers therefore found it difficult to get employment. Having realized that English education is the key to more job opportunities, many parents have no hesitation in sending their children to English schools. Many of the students themselves also realise the painful fact that a purely Chinese education would only lead to unemployment and frustration.

The 40 Chinese secondary schools that exist today are generally known as Independent schools. They do not receive any aid whatsoever from the government. Their main medium

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1. Cf. Monthly Statistical Bulletin of West Malaysia, August, 1972, p.219.

of instruction is Chinese. Most of these schools face the common problems of finance and shortage of students and their academic standard is generally poor.

As noted earlier, the phenomenal growth of Chinese education began at the turn of the century. In the beginning, it was almost entirely dependent on private initiative and community organizations. There were two main sources of revenue: tuition fees from the pupils and contributions from guilds and associations and some community-minded private individuals. No aid was obtained from the government. At any rate there was no reason for the British colonial government to provide Chinese education for the Chinese community. The colonialists were only interested in education in so far as to provide a limited English education to a small number of people to fill clerical positions in the British administration and business concerns.

During those early days Chinese education paid little attention to local conditions. It was completely China-oriented in its values, style of administration, contents and methods. Most of the Chinese school teachers were recruited from China. Text-books were also imported from China. The whole purpose of education seems to have been directed at instilling in the pupils a sense of Chinese nationalism by arousing their awareness of the great Chinese cultural heritage. This type of China-oriented education

tended to produce a group of people who regarded themselves 'purely and simply as Chinese' in contrast with the more 'Malayan outlook' of the Chinese who attended English-medium schools (Purcell, 1967:222).

As the Chinese schools were financed and run by the Chinese community itself, they were allowed to exist for the most part outside the jurisdiction of the government. No official control was exercised and the Chinese were quite happy running their own schools without any interference. When in 1935 the government decided to extend grants-in-aid to Chinese vernacular schools on condition that they conformed to certain requirements, the response expected from the Chinese community was not encouraging. By this time they had grown accustomed to the idea of looking after their own affairs. They were aware that acceptance of a grant carried with it a certain measure of control. Most of the schools rather chose to carry on shouldering their financial responsibilities themselves (Comber, 1961:31-32). However, after the Second World War, many Chinese schools began to show an interest in obtaining partial aid from the government in order to improve their facilities. The government on its part also endeavoured to devise a national education system and attempt to bring the Chinese schools slowly into the main stream of the system. The government's efforts in this direction can be seen through the various education committee reports and education enactments.

### The Barnes Report

The first official report that had directly affected the position of the Chinese education in Malaya was the Report of the Committee on Malay education, commonly referred to as the Barnes Report. The Committee was appointed in 1950 by the then High Commissioner of Malaya, Sir Henry Gurney to look into the various aspects of the education facilities available for the Malays (Barnes Report, 1951:v). It was headed by L.J. Barnes, Director of Social Training at Oxford University and composed exclusively of Europeans and Malays. No Chinese or Indian was represented.

The Committee recommended, inter alia, the setting up of an inter-racial common school system in which Malay and English were to be the only media of instruction (Barnes Report, 1951:75). Furthermore - and this was very disturbing to the non-Malay communities - it went beyond its terms of reference and recommended 'the end of separate vernacular schools for the several racial communities' in an attempt to create a common Malayan citizenship through a unified national system of education (Barnes Report:75).

Understandably, the Report was generally well received by the Malays, since the Committee was specifically set up to look into the problems of Malay education. The reactions of the non-Malay communities were however more complicated. Various sections of the Chinese community expressed their disapproval of the Report. For example, a meeting of representatives from various Chinese guilds and associations

in the state of Perak was called and a resolution passed unanimously to oppose the implementation of the Report.<sup>2</sup> Even the Straits Times in its editorial described the Barnes Report as 'prostitution of education to politics' (Finkelstein, 1952:15).

The Indians too protested against the Report. Under the auspices of the Malayan Indian Congress, about thirty-five Indian educators met in Kuala Lumpur to condemn the Report and request delay in its execution. A group of Indian school teachers in Negri Sembilan also passed a resolution protesting against the Report and asking the government for the appointment of a special committee to look into Indian education (Finkelstein, 1952:15).

In all fairness, the recommendations of the Committee for a national system of education to create a common citizenship was perfectly sound in principle. Nevertheless, as an official body, it was not representative: neither the Chinese nor the Indians were represented on the Committee. Nor were they invited to give their views. It was this fact, together with the recommendation for the termination of vernacular schools that aroused the suspicions and resentment of the Chinese and Indians - more so the former whose school system had been built up almost entirely by private initiative with very little government aid.

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2. The Perak Chinese Chamber of Commerce Report (1971:10).

The Fenn-Wu Report

The Fenn-Wu Report, unlike the Barnes Report, was more directly concerned with Chinese education. The Committee was appointed in early 1951 to look into the various problems of Chinese education. It consisted of Dr. William Fenn, Associate Executive Secretary of the Board of Trustees of a dozen institutions of higher learning in China, and Dr. Wu Teh-yao, a United Nations official.

Compared to the Barnes Committee, the Fenn-Wu Committee appeared to be more objective in its views, in that it sought to gather opinions not only from the Chinese but also from the representatives of other racial groups. As a result, the Report which was published in June, 1951 adopted a more liberal and sympathetic attitude towards Chinese education. The most significant difference between the Barnes report and that of the Fenn-Wu was that the former aimed to achieve a common Malayan nationality through the national school system using Malay and English only, while the latter felt that a Malayan nationality could develop through the co-existence of the various traditions and cultures.

Recognizing as it did the psychological and emotional attachments of the racial groups towards their cultures and languages, the Report cautioned that any attempt to impose one language or two languages upon the peoples of Malaya would be detrimental to communal understanding and national

unity, since the unity of a nation 'depends not upon the singleness of tongue or simplicity of culture', but upon 'the hearts of its citizens' (Fenn-Wu Report, 1951:6). It further added that 'any attempt at the moment to force unwilling fusion will almost certainly lead to further cleavage, which neither Malaya nor the world can afford' (Fenn-Wu Report, 1951:4).

On the question of the future of Chinese language and schools, the Report, while recognizing the need to include Malay and English in the curriculum of all schools, held the view that the Chinese language was there to stay. Chinese schools, the Report suggested, would persist in Malaya for a long time to come. 'They cannot be eliminated until the Chinese themselves decide that they are not needed... That day may never come, for it is quite possible that Chinese schools should form an integral part of any educational programme of the future Malaya' (Fenn-Wu Report, 1951:10).

Because of its sympathetic attitude towards Chinese education, the Fenn-Wu Report was readily accepted by the Chinese community which had earlier expressed strong fear and suspicion about the mission as a mere tool designed to further an established government policy (Fenn-Wu Report, 1951:2).

Following the publication of the Barnes and the Fenn-Wu Reports, and the controversies caused by the divergence between them, a Central Advisory Committee on Education was established to consider the vital issues involved in Malay and Chinese education. The Central Advisory Committee, while supporting the Barnes Proposals, made some concessions to the non-Malay communities, in recommending that Kuo-Yu and Tamil could be taught as subjects of studies in schools.<sup>3</sup>

#### The 1952 Education Ordinance

In 1952, a Select Committee of the Legislative Council was appointed to give further consideration to the reports of the three previous Committees and to make recommendations for the implementation of the Advisory Committee Report. The resulting Education Ordinance, 1952 accepted the Barnes concept of a National School System with six years free primary education, and the Advisory Committee's proposal to provide facilities for the teaching of Kuo-Yu and Tamil, in addition to making Malay and English as media of instruction. The 1952 Education Ordinance was not well received by the Chinese community. The Chinese feared that the policy would endanger their language and culture (Straits Times, Feb. 5, 1954). In response, the MCA - the sole

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3. Federation of Malaya, Central Advisory Committee on Education, Report on the Barnes Report on Malay Education and the Fenn-Wu Report on Chinese Education (1951:3).



Chinese political party at that time - set up a Chinese Education Central Committee in 1953 to rally the support of the Chinese school teachers and those interested in Chinese education in opposition to the government's education policy (Haas, 1967:85).

As things turned out, few of the plans contained in the Ordinance were implemented. The reason was not because of Chinese opposition, but because of the lack of funds on the part of the government. In 1953, government expenditure on education jumped to M\$95.68 million (as compared to only M\$11.5 million in 1946), and the government deficit for the year was over M\$200 million. This unfavourable financial position prompted the High Commissioner to appoint a special Commission to look into the feasibility of implementing the education policy. *The Commission concluded that the multi-racial schools were 'essential' but out of the question due to a lack of funds* (Simandjuntak, 1969:199).

The reactions to both the Barnes Report and the Fenn-Wu Report were generally divided on communal lines - a feature characteristic of Malaysia on almost every vital issue. Throughout the controversy, the Malay- and English-language press had on the whole favoured the Barnes Report while the Chinese press had whole-heartedly supported the Fenn-Wu proposals. There was, however, one exception to the attitude of the English-language press, the Singapore Standard, which favoured the Fenn-Wu Report enthusiastically (Purcell, 1953:74-75). The Indian press had in the main

been neutral in the controversy. But this does not mean that the Indian community was not interested in the issue. In fact the reactions of the Indian educators in Kuala Lumpur and Negri Sembilan mentioned earlier indicated not only that they too were concerned about their education but also that the controversy was not solely confined to Chinese and Malay communities.

### The Razak Report

As mentioned earlier, many of the proposals pertaining to education were shelved largely as a result of shortage of funds. There was a cooling off period for the Chinese education controversy. But it was not long before the controversy came to the fore again. This was the controversy over the Razak Committee Report, formed at the end of 1955 after the first Alliance government took office. It had as its terms of reference 'to examine the present Education policy of the Federation of Malaya and to recommend any alterations or adaptations that are necessary with a view to establishing a national system of education acceptable to the people of the Federation as a whole.... having regard to the intention to make Malay the national language of the country whilst preserving and sustaining the growth of the language and culture of other communities living in the country' (The Razak Report, 1957:1). The proposals put forward by the Razak Committee were largely adopted by the Federal Legislative Council as the 1957 Education Ordinance.

The Razak Report contained several important features. First, Malay was to be made the National language and must be taught in all schools (Razak Report, 1957:4). Secondly, a common content syllabus was to be introduced in all schools to achieve a 'Malayan outlook'. The introduction of a common content syllabus 'is an essential element in the development of a united Malayan nation' (Razak Report, 1957:18).

The third feature was the administration of common public examinations to all schools. There should be two selection examinations, one at the end of primary school for entry to secondary schools, and the other at the end of the third year in secondary schools, namely the Lower Certificate of Education. All pupils who complete the secondary academic course should also sit for the same examination, that is, the Federation of Malaya Certificate of Education (Razak Report, 1957:12-13).

Two other proposals of the Report merit mention here. The first relates to primary education. The Report abandoned the idea of the national school system as advocated by the Barnes Report. It proposed two types of primary schools, namely, standard primary schools with Malay as the medium of instruction and standard-type primary schools in which the main medium of instruction may be Kuo-Yu or Tamil or English. Malay and English were compulsory subjects in all schools. Kuo-Yu and Tamil would be taught in all primary schools whenever the parents of fifteen children or more requested it (Razak Report, 1957, 9-10). Under the system, Malay

children would be bilingual and Chinese and Indian children tri-lingual. Moreover, most children would continue their primary education in separate vernacular schools.

The second proposal concerns secondary education. There should be only one type of national secondary school where the pupils worked towards a common final examination. While Malay and English should be made compulsory subjects, The Report did not seek to change the practice in Chinese secondary schools of using Kuo-Yu as a general medium of instruction. It saw 'no educational objection to the learning of three languages in secondary schools or to the use of more than one language in the same school as the medium of instruction' (Razak Report. 1957:12).

The Razak Report, by giving some minor concessions to the position of Chinese education, did not please the Chinese community. The Chinese on the whole wanted their language to be given official recognition and felt that Malayan nationality could be developed on the basis of multi-lingualism. Many probably regarded the adoption of Malay as the national language as part of an effort to create a Malay rather than a Malayan nation (Haas, 1967:89).

Some Chinese, however, did not seem to object to the principle of Malay being the national language. But, as the second largest community in the country, many wanted

the Chinese language to be given also an official status and that examinations should be given in the medium of instruction. The Chinese point of view was most clearly expressed by Lim Lian Geok, president of the powerful United Chinese School Teachers Association:

The Chinese schools and most of the Chinese community ... (accepted) the principle of Malay being the national language of independent Malaya ... To foster unity among the various races, a common language was necessary ... This could only be Malay (since) Malay was the language of the majority of the population and was spoken by a good proportion of the non-Malays also ... To develop this common language and to make more people learn it, Malay should be taught compulsorily in all types of schools, and the Chinese would be the first to give their full support for this policy. However, the claim by Chinese schools (and students) for education in their mother tongue and (for) allowing them to take examinations in the same language medium as in the schools was most reasonable ...

(The Malay Mail, Jan.7, 1959).

In the previous chapter, reference has already been made to the Alliance crisis of 1959 in which one of the two major issues involved was the education-language controversy. The education-language controversy centred around the official status of the Chinese language and the medium of instruction and of examinations in Chinese schools. In September, 1958, a meeting of 500 Chinese educationists was held and a resolution passed to call upon the Alliance to include in its election manifesto a pledge that Chinese should be made an official language (Haas, 1967:134; Moore, 1960:203).

In April the following year, a meeting of representatives of Chinese guilds and associations was held. The meeting, sponsored by the country's three most important and influential Chinese educational groups - The United Chinese School Teachers Association (UCSTA), The United Chinese School Committees Association (UCSCA) and the MCA Central Education Committee - made several demands. These included, among others, the call to guarantee that 'the mother tongue of the pupil should be used as the medium of instruction and the medium of examination in all schools', and that 'equitable and fair treatment' in education should be given to all Malayan students irrespective of race (Haas, 1967:139-140). In the meeting, Lim Lian Geok repeatedly criticized the government for harming Chinese schools and education by introducing what he called 'unreasonable measures'.

The crux of the whole problem is that the government is using the official language issue as a weapon to force Chinese students to sit for their examinations in English. If we accept this ..., thousands of Chinese students will be forced into the streets.

(Haas, 1967:140).

Lim Chong Eu, the MCA president, in a secret letter to The Prime Minister, also urged that until the Malay language was sufficiently developed, Kuo-Yu should continue to function as a medium of instruction and examination in Chinese schools, and that the results of such examinations should be recognized as equivalent to those of the national secondary school examinations (Straits Times, July 10, 1959).

The call for Chinese as an official language sparked some negative reactions from the Malay community. Tengku Abdul Rahman responded by saying that no other language (apart from the Malay language) would be made an official language since this would only delay Malaya's social unification. He warned that:

The sooner everybody appreciates that we must have one language for the country, the better. They should also realize that the Malay rulers have a big say in the matter ... I want to make it clear that while we can give, we can also come to a point at which we can stop giving. This is the point at which I can stop giving, that is, on the language issue.

(Haas, 1967:136).

The PMIP also came out to object to the suggestion that Chinese be made an official language. The party clearly intended to rally Malay support against such a move (Straits Budget, Nov.12, 1958).

The stand taken by the Chinese educational organizations clearly indicated the absence of any permanent agreement between Malays and non-Malays on educational policy, while the reactions from the Tengku and PMIP was an indication of the intransigence of the Malays on the education-language controversy.

The Talib Education Review Committee

The Talib Committee, headed by Abdul Rahman bin Talib, was appointed in 1960 to review the Razak Plan and its implementation, and to make further recommendations. On the Razak policy, the Committee's finding was that it 'has been faithfully and successfully carried out within the limits imposed by financial stringency in 1958 and 1959 and by the sheer magnitude of the many-sided task'. However, the Committee felt that 'there is still more that needs to be done in the fields of technical, commercial and secondary education ...' and more importantly, that 'there is a long road to travel before the ultimate objective of making the National Language the main medium of instruction in all schools can be fully realized' (Talib Report, 1960:14).

Several proposals of the Talib Report affected Chinese education. First of all, all Chinese secondary schools which were partially assisted should either apply for full assistance (in which case they became national-type schools and had to conform to the Ministry of Education's requirements and subject to more control) or become Independent schools without any government aid. All partial assistance to non-conforming schools would be discontinued as from January 1962 (Talib Report, 1960:29). Secondly, the 3-3 system, that is, three years of Junior-Middle followed by three years of Senior Middle in the assisted Chinese secondary schools should be converted to the 4-2 system, that is, four years of lower secondary and two years of upper secondary, the



first year being called the Remove class, a special language class for pupils who have had education in a language medium other than that of the secondary school.

Another important change was that all Chinese school examinations - the Junior Middle Three examination, the Chinese Secondary Schools Promotion examination, and the Chinese Secondary Schools Leaving Certificate examination - should be discontinued from 1961. They would be replaced by the LCE and FMCE examinations, conducted only in Malay and English. There would be no special examinations for Independent schools, although entries from Independent schools would be accepted for the LCE and FMCE examinations (Talib Report, 1960:33).

Many Chinese who saw the proposals as a calculated onslaught against Chinese education and language came out to oppose the scheme. Too Joon Hing, the MCA Secretary-General who resigned as a result of the 1959 crisis, unsuccessfully called for the withdrawal of the new Education Bill embodying the Talib proposals and the appointment of an all-party committee to undertake a fresh review of the Razak Report (Simandjuntak, 1969:204).

Lim Lian Geok, a strong advocate of Chinese education, objected to the idea of the conversion of Chinese secondary schools to national-type schools which meant greater control of these schools by the government. He also attacked the

government's plan to discontinue financial assistance to private Chinese secondary schools. Urging the government to 'go slow' in implementing the Talib Report, Lim said that he would not 'shirk in his responsibility in fighting for a square deal on behalf of Chinese schools' (Haas, 1967: 186).

As a result of his views on educational policies, the once 'Most powerful man in Malaya' (King, 1957:40) had his permit to teach in government schools cancelled in 1961. More importantly, the government asked him 'to show cause why his citizenship should not be revoked' (Straits Budget, August 30, 1961). He was charged by the Registrar-General of citizenship with

deliberate misinterpretation and inversions of government policy in a manner calculated to excite disaffection... Emotional appeals of an extreme communal nature calculated to promote ill-will and hostility between different races in the Federation and likely to cause violence.

(Haas, 1967:186-7).

The chief justice of Malaya ruled that Lim's citizenship could not be revoked merely because he had criticized the government on its education policies. Such an action could be taken only if his activities were considered to endanger domestic peace or showed disloyalty to the country. However, as a result of appeals by the Registrar-General of citizenship through the Malayan Supreme Court and British

Privy Council, Lim's citizenship was finally revoked in 1964. It is difficult to assess whether the revocation of Lim's citizenship was due to an honest belief that he had abused his rights as a Malayan citizen or merely because of his anti-government views on educational policies, although the latter appeared to be an important factor. What is clear, however, is that Lim's case gave further evidence that the Malays were determined to preserve the 'Malay' nature of the country and were not prepared to give much concessions to the Chinese in matters relating to education (Haas, 2967:187).

#### The 1967 Language Bill

The 1957 Constitution of the Federation of Malaya (Article 152, Clauses 1 and 2) provided that 'the national language shall be the Malay language,' though English still retained its official status 'for a period of ten years after merdeka day, and thereafter until Parliament otherwise provides...' The ten years period ended on August 31, 1967 and Malay was made the country's national and sole official language with effect from September 1, 1967.

Before the Bill was passed, concern was shown by the Chinese community as regards the status of the Chinese language. The Chinese feared that the propagation of Malay as the sole official language would inevitably jeopardize their language. Their fear was aggravated by

the formation of the National Language Action Front (NLAF) in early 1965 by what the Chinese regarded as a Malay communist, Syed Nasir bin Ismail. The aim of the NLAF was to 'assist the government in the implementation of Malay as the official language by 1967' (Straits Times, April 6, 1965). In February, 1966, the National Language Month Conference headed by Syed Nasir called upon the Alliance government to implement Article 152 of the Constitution and make Malay the sole official language of the country on September 1, 1967 (Straits Times, Feb. 26, 1966). Syed Nasir had always been feared by the Chinese as an extremist, and it was understood that his aim in forming the NLAF was to rally Malay support and put pressure on the government to ensure that no concessions were made to the non-Malays (Vasil, 1972:14).

In response to this, certain groups both within the Chinese community as a whole and within the MCA began to defend the position of their language. The Selangor branch of the MCA passed a resolution to call upon the national body to secure a 'more liberal use' of the Chinese language for official purposes (The Malay Mail, Oct. 4, 1966). Almost immediately, the Perak branch came out in support of the resolution. Then came the Penang branch which passed a resolution that 'Chinese should be respected and accepted as a language for official and extensive use throughout the country' (Straits Times, Oct. 10, 1966).

Realizing the disquiet of some of its branches and the intensity of the feelings among certain sections of the Chinese community, the MCA Central Working Committee held an emergency meeting at which it was decided that while the party could not support any move to have Chinese made an official language, it 'pledged its support for the more liberal use of Chinese language in selected fields and in government notices, forms and so on' (M.Roff, 1967:323). This attitude of the MCA showed clearly that there were conservative but influential elements within the party who were concerned above all else with remaining safely within the Alliance and were willing to make whatever compromise and accommodation was necessary to this end. These people were prepared to pay lip services to the Chinese community to achieve their aim but they would never dare to press too hard on any communal issue for fear of jeopardising their own position within the Alliance.

It is interesting to note that in the same meeting of the MCA Central Working Committee that pledged 'for more liberal use of Chinese language', one of its three vice-presidents of the party's youth section, Sim Mow Yu, was expelled for 'defying party leadership'. Significantly enough, Sim was the president of the UCSTA and like his predecessor Lim Lian Geok, a strong advocate of Chinese education and culture. If Lim Lian Geok's case was an indication of the Malays' wariness towards demands for change in respect to education-language policies, then the

expulsion of Sim Mow Yu was evidence of MCA's reluctance to change. Both incidents, however, further indicated that demanding the Chinese language to be accorded official status was not to be tolerated - not even by the MCA that purports to safeguard the interests of the Chinese.

On the eve of the passage of the Bill, discussion and dissension continued. The various Chinese guilds and associations were warned by the Registrar of Societies that it was improper for them to meddle in the language controversy since it was a political matter, and since their membership was open to non-citizens as well (M.Roff, 1967:324).

When the Bill was finally passed, the Chinese community as a whole was unhappy that Chinese language was not accorded official status. However, there were some consolations. Fairly liberal provisions were made in the Bill for the use of other languages. Clause 3 of the Bill which had been seen as a concession to the non-Malay communities, affirmed that 'Nothing in this Act shall affect the right of the Federal Government or any State Government to use any translation of official documents or communications in the language of any other community in the Federation for such purposes as may be deemed necessary in the public interest'. Clause 4 states that 'the Yang Di Pertuan Agong may permit the continued use of the English language for such official purposes as may be deemed fit'. Clauses 5-8 provided for the continued use of English in the Courts, Federal Parliament and State Assemblies, and in the texts of laws.

While the non-Malays, in particular the Chinese, were relieved at the 'liberality' of the provisions of the Bill, many groups within the Malay community were dissatisfied with it. These groups included some UMNO branches, various Malay Teachers' Associations, the Malay Language Society of the University of Malaya and PENAMA, the national writers' association. These groups united under the leadership of the NLA in an attempt to persuade the government to change the Bill (M.Roff, 1967:327). Their opposition was two-fold. First they opposed the provision for the continued widespread use of English, and that no time limit was stipulated as to the use of English for official purposes. Second, they felt that the Bill had indirectly introduced multi-lingualism by giving Chinese and Tamil a kind of 'semi-official' status (Vasil, 1972:15).

The Language Bill controversy had raised once again the emotive language-education issue. The opposition parties took the occasion to secure support for their respective parties. Within the UMNO and the Malay community there were also signs of dissension and divisions, and widespread feeling of having been let down by the Alliance and the Tengku. In the MCA too, the issue created some divisions between the branches on the one hand and the national organization on the other.

Measures Detrimental to Chinese Education

With the exception of the Barnes Report which proposed to abolish all vernacular schools, no other government-appointed education reports directly attempted to abolish Chinese schools. The government must have realized that with the Chinese constituting more than one-third of the total population, it would be dynamite for it to attempt to close any Chinese schools, the majority of which had been set up by the Chinese themselves through their own initiative. The policy not to abolish Chinese and other vernacular schools is in sharp contrast with that of many other Southeast Asian nations where the Chinese are in a minority. In Thailand, Chinese schools have been most severely restricted and many have been closed down for having failed to comply with government's regulations (Murray, 1964:71, 74-75). In Indonesia, beginning 1957, most of the Chinese schools have been nationalized and converted to Indonesian-medium institutions following the government curriculum. Only in some of these converted schools, was Chinese offered as a language subject for a few hours weekly. Chinese who were Indonesian citizens were barred from attending Chinese schools (Murray, 1964:77-78). In South Vietnam, severe restrictions had been placed on the curriculum and administration of Chinese schools (Murray, 1964:84). But in Malaya, since Independence, not one Chinese school has been forcibly closed by the government and no Chinese child has ever been barred from receiving education in his mother tongue.



Nevertheless, the various measures taken by the government were by no means conducive to the development of Chinese schools and education. One important measure taken by the government was the ruling requiring all Chinese secondary schools to decide by the end of 1961 whether they wished to become national-type schools or remain Independent. In the case of the former, the schools would receive full financial assistance and the main medium of instructions would be either English or Malay. In the latter case, Chinese could be used as the main medium of instruction but financial aid from the government would be discontinued (Talib Report, 1960:29). This policy, many Chinese educationalists rightly believed, had sounded the death-knell of Chinese language and education, and had resulted in Chinese language being relegated to a position of secondary importance in comparison with either English or Malay (Comber, 1961:30).

Another important measure was the abolition of examinations in the medium of Chinese with effect from 1961. These included the Junior Middle Three examination, Chinese Secondary Schools Promotion examination, and the Chinese Secondary Schools Leaving Certificate examination (Talib Report, 1960:33). All Chinese school students who wish to enter assisted schools or go for further studies in the University of Malaya have to sit for public examinations such as the LCE, the MCE and finally the HSC, all in Malay or English only. This means that the medium of instruction in Chinese schools (i.e. Chinese) cannot be accepted as the medium of examinations. With their relatively lower standard of English, their chances

of success in the public examinations are not as good as students from English-medium schools. Furthermore, Chinese is no longer an important examination subject, in that passing or failing the language does not affect the overall performance of a student's examination. In the examinations held in Chinese on the other hand, Chinese language was crucial in the examination results. A student who failed his Chinese language would not be awarded a certificate, which meant in effect he failed the whole examination.

A further blow to Chinese school and education was the government's refusal to recognize the value of Chinese school diplomas or certificates. A graduate who completed Chinese Senior Middle Three with six years of secondary education is in a much inferior position to a student possessing only the LCE, who has only completed three years of secondary education in an English or a Malay school. The same problem is faced by Chinese graduates who obtain degrees from the Nanyang University in Singapore or universities in Taiwan. Their degrees are likewise not recognized by the government. Due to lack of knowledge in Malay, these graduates find it difficult to obtain jobs; and if they are lucky enough to find one, it is often much below that for which they are qualified. As a result, there is a widespread feeling among these Chinese-educated that they have been unfairly treated. Resentment and frustration resulting from being discriminated thus lead many of these Chinese graduates to

incline to radical political doctrines. In this connection, it is therefore incorrect, as Wolfgang Franke (1965:185-6) has suggested, to identify political extremism with Chinese education as such. Political radicalization among the Chinese school students is largely the result of frustration and resentment.

All these measures - discontinuation of government aid to Chinese secondary schools, abolition of examinations conducted in Chinese and non-recognition of Chinese diplomas and certificates - have the net effect of discouraging the growth of Chinese schools and education. Consequently, Chinese schools are losing grounds. The Chinese as a whole love their language and culture, even though many of them can neither read nor write Chinese themselves. They support Chinese schools because they rightly recognize that these schools are the most effective formal institutions for imparting their cultural values and patterns to the younger generation. The maintenance of these values and patterns is crucial for their communal cohesiveness. But the Chinese are practical people too. They realize that giving their children a pure Chinese education would only do the latter a gross disservice, and handicap them in making a good living. They are thus faced with a difficult choice between maintenance of Chinese culture in the form of Chinese schools and a good living (guaranteed by an English education). Many have chosen the latter. Interestingly, many heads of Chinese schools, while making great efforts to persuade

parents to have their children educated in Chinese schools, send their own children to English schools. These heads certainly realize the economic value of an English education.

### Education and Politics

Due to the plural nature of the Malaysian society, education-language issue has always been able to arouse intense feeling among the various communities. This issue has been particularly significant in politics. Ratnam (1965:200), for instance, equated the language issue and educational policies in general with 'the salt and the pepper' and said that 'they had to be in everything'.

Reference has already been made to the Barnes Report and Chinese reactions. In the 1955 election, the Alliance manifesto was careful not to alienate Chinese electorate. On education, it promised that it would 'allow vernacular schools their normal expansion'. At any rate at this time the overriding question was Independence, and potentially explosive issues such as education were relatively little discussed.

But with the publication of the Razak Report in 1956, the education-language issue came to a head and dominated the political scene for some time. Chinese antagonism was particularly aroused by the proposals to make Malay and English compulsory subjects in all schools, and media of

public examinations. Despite the effort of some of the MCA old guard leaders to convince the Chinese community that the promotion of a national system of education was not incompatible with the preservation of Chinese culture and language, many of the Chinese were unmoved and unconvinced. Their discontent and dissatisfaction was demonstrated politically a year later (1957) when in a by-election at Ipoh, the MCA candidate was defeated by a PPP candidate who capitalized on the Chinese education issue (M.Roff, 1965:50).

Again, in 1959, it was disagreement over the Chinese education issue that nearly broke up the Alliance as well as the MCA. In this case it was the moderate elements within the MCA which reasserted themselves and forced the more extreme members to withdraw.

In the 1964 election the education-language question was not of critical political significance as in 1959. At that time Indonesian 'confrontation' was the major national issue and unifying slogan for the Alliance. The language issue which would have loomed large was relegated to secondary importance. Nevertheless it was still the most important communal issue at the time. Chinese opposition parties such as the UDP, PPP and DAP included in their manifesto as an important item that Chinese should be made an official language in addition to Malay. All of them attacked the government on its policy on Chinese education.

Throughout the election campaign, the UDP was the strongest critic of the government's Chinese education policy. The party accused the Alliance of 'deceit and insincerity' for trying to give the impression that it was promoting Chinese education merely by distributing money to Chinese schools,<sup>4</sup> when it was clear that Chinese schools and education had been discriminated under the existing policies. The UDP argued that 'the basic problem was that of protecting and preserving a truly good Chinese education, and it has in the medium of teaching and examination' (Sin Chew Jit Poh, Feb. 2, 1964).

In the 1969 election the education-language issue once again assumed its political significance. This was partly due to the 1967 National Language Bill which made Malay the sole official language of the country. Moreover, the non-Malay communities, the Chinese in particular, were more and more dissatisfied with the position of their language and education. This discontent and dissatisfaction provided the non-Malay opposition parties such as the PPP and the DAP a handy issue to project themselves as the champions of the cause of the non-Malay communities. On the question of Chinese language, the DAP's position was clear. While

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4. Shortly before the election campaign began, the MCA president, who was also the Finance Minister, toured the country distributing money to Chinese schools - obviously in an attempt to win electoral support. The total sum distributed was M\$5 million. Cf. Sin Chew Jit Poh, Feb. 29, 1964.

accepting Malay as the national language, it sought to obtain official status for the Chinese, Tamil and English languages. It also advocated the 'free use of Chinese, Tamil and English in Parliament, State Assemblies, and in public notices and government correspondence'.<sup>5</sup> The PPP stuck to its education and language policy. The party demanded that 'the medium of instruction and examination should be in accordance with the wishes of the parents' and that it would 'continue its struggle for the recognition of Chinese and Tamil as official languages in addition to Malay'.<sup>6</sup>

Some time before the 1969 general election, one of the communal issues that dominated the political scene for a while was the proposed establishment of the Merdeka University where the medium of instruction would be Chinese. The Merdeka University was proposed by certain sections of the Chinese community to provide facilities for higher studies to Chinese-medium students. These students, because of their generally poor standard of English, could not enter the University of Malaya where the medium was English. Within the country, there were no other facilities for higher studies available to them. Traditionally, therefore, they had to go to Singapore or Taiwan for their higher studies in Chinese. But those who went abroad had

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5. DAP General Elections Manifesto, 1969.

6. People's Progressive Party of Malaya Mainfesto, 1969.

always been restricted to a small number who could afford it. The majority of the Chinese secondary school leavers could not afford to go abroad and had to look for a job in the country. This, they found very difficult because their diplomas had not been recognized by the government. These students thus faced a dilemma: they could neither go for further studies nor obtain jobs. Parents began to realize that sending their children to Chinese secondary schools was to handicap them in the struggle for jobs. This attitude partly contributed to the decline of Chinese-medium schools.

The Merdeka University would provide these students an outlet. So when the scheme was proposed, it was favourably received by a large section of the Chinese community who had probably come to believe that one sure way to ensure the existence of Chinese secondary schools was to provide higher studies facilities within the country. But the scheme did not find favour with the government which feared that it would only promote more Chinese chauvinism and perpetuate the gulf between the various communities.

As the champion of the cause of the non-Malay communities, it was to be expected that the DAP came out in full support of the Merdeka University project. The Gerakan, considered to be a moderate party, was also in favour of, and supported the establishment of the Merdeka University in its election manifesto. The PPP did not mention the Merdeka University scheme in its manifesto, but from the party's stand on multi-lingualism, it could not have objected it.



The proposal, however, put the MCA in a dilemma. On the one hand the party could not support the proposal openly for fear of hurting its senior partner in the Alliance, the UMNO. On the other hand it could not afford to reject it outright because that would result in too much loss in Chinese votes in the election. As a middle-course, the MCA initiated the idea of a Tengku Abdul Rahman College (a feeder college to prepare Chinese-medium students for admission to universities) to replace the Merdeka University scheme.

In rejecting the Merdeka University scheme, a top MCA official reasoned:

A private racial university, no matter in what language medium it may be, would not be conducive to promoting harmony and understanding in a multi-racial society. In the present circumstances, it can only bring confusion and misunderstanding.

(The Guardian, March, 1968:1).

The then MCA president, Tan Siew Sin, in rejecting the Merdeka University scheme in favour of the feeder college, commented:

It is true that we require more universities and more institutions of higher learning... but it should also be acknowledged that it is better to take a little more time and eventually establish first-class institutions rather than for a few individuals to make haste on their own and set up a university which would not be worthy of the name and which would do far more harm than good to those whom it is designed to benefit...

(The Guardian, April, 1968:3).

The idea of the Merdeka University was eventually dropped. In its place the MCA, with the support of the Alliance government, set up the Tengku Abdul Rahman College in early 1969, shortly before the general election. The Tengku Abdul Rahman College was regarded by some Chinese as 'something better than nothing at all'. But in the eyes of the sponsors of the Merdeka University, the college was nothing more than an attempt to sabotage their project.

The proposal to establish a Chinese university at least partly stimulated the Malay desire to set up a Malay University. In 1970, two years after the Chinese university was proposed, the National University (whose main medium is Malay) was established. It is difficult to say what would have been the Malay reaction had the Merdeka University come into being. Perhaps the hostile attitudes of Malay students at the University of Malaya towards the Tengku Abdul Rahman College offer some guide in this respect. In August, 1972, Malay students at the University of Malaya demonstrated against the Alliance government for supporting the college. They were hostile towards the college basically for its failure to use Malay as the medium of instruction. This practice, according to them, was against the principle of the national education system.<sup>7</sup>

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7. The Alliance Government has committed itself to giving financial support to the college since 1969 in the hope of strengthening the electoral appeal of the MCA, since the college was an adjunct to the MCA. Cf. The Guardian (London), August, 25, 1972.

Political and Social Consequences of the Continued  
Existence of Chinese Schools.

The Malays always see themselves as the bumiputra (sons of the soil) and as such it is natural for them to see that their language becomes the national and sole official language both in words and in reality. The Chinese, too have always been proud of their own language and schools which are part of what they regard as their great cultural heritage. If possible, the Chinese, like the Malays, would like to see that their language be recognized at least for official purposes.

As long as the Malay and Chinese positions remain mutually exclusive, the continued existence of Chinese schools would remain a source of irritation between the two communities. As has often been the case before, the issue would assume political significance and find political expressions in the near future. It is not likely that the issue would be easily resolved to the satisfaction of all parties concerned.

So far as cultural assimilation is concerned, the continued existence of Chinese education presents a great obstacle. A proportion of the Chinese would insist that their children be educated in the Chinese language. This group of Chinese school product would have a different orientation from that of students under the national education system. There would be little interaction and understanding between the Chinese-educated group on the one hand, and the rest of the student community on the other. This quite

effectively prevents the process of social integration from taking place among the students. Interaction and integration are two inter-related processes. In a study of ethnic attitudes among Chinese and Malay students, a scholar has concluded that the higher the rate of interaction among students, the higher the sense of integration (Rabushka, 1969:53-63). It should, of course, be borne in mind that interaction may lead to conflict and friction rather than integration or assimilation. But a certain amount of racial friction may be inevitable and may well be a worthwhile price for progress towards an integrated society.

The continued existence of Chinese education also means the continued inflow of Chinese school leavers and Chinese university graduates into the labour market. But the government's non-recognition of their academic qualifications not only prevents them from obtaining jobs in government and quasi-government establishment, but it also deprives the nation of trained human resources which are so badly needed for the development of the nation.

More importantly, government's discrimination against Chinese-educated graduates would antagonize as well as frustrate them, setting in motion a self-fulfilling prophecy: subscription to, or more seriously, indulgence in political extremism and communist ideology which the government itself can neither tolerate nor afford.

### Recent Developments

Since 1969, especially after the May 13 communal disturbance in Kuala Lumpur, there has been a drastic change in the economic policy of the government. In the field of education, the government has also been very determined to implement Malay as the national and sole official language of the country. Increasingly, emphasis has been placed on the use of the Malay language. Slowly, but steadily, English, which had been an important tool of communication both officially and unofficially is now being relegated to a secondary position. English as a medium of instruction at the University of Malaya has been slowly replaced by Malay. At the National University which was set up in 1970, the medium of instruction is wholly Malay. So is the medium of instruction at the Serdang Agricultural University set up in 1973.

At the primary school level, Malay was made the sole medium of instruction in the first year of English-medium primary schools in 1970. By 1982, all government-assisted secondary schools will use Malay as the sole medium of instruction. English and Chinese will only be taught as language subjects. Consequently, by 1983, all except language courses for new admission to universities will be conducted in the Malay language (Second Malaysia Plan, p.236).

The forty Independent Chinese secondary schools in Malaya are subject to less control by the government since they receive no aid from it. These schools are allowed to use Chinese as the main medium of instruction. There are no special examinations for these Independent schools. The students are, however, allowed to sit for the LCE and MCE, both of which are conducted in the medium of English or Malay only. Some of the students who complete their Senior Middle Three can further their studies at the Nanyang University or universities in Taiwan.

As indicated earlier, these Independent Chinese schools are faced with the problems of finance, shortage of students and poor academic standard. In view of this, a meeting of representatives of Independent schools was held in July, 1972. The meeting resulted in the formation of an Independent School Sub-Committee to look into the various problems of Independent schools. This Sub-Committee was to function under the three highest organizations which identify themselves with Chinese education - the UCSTA, UCSCA and the MCA Central Education Committee. The meeting also urged the public, in particular the Chinese, to support Independent Chinese schools so as to preserve Chinese education. It also called on the government to resume Chinese Senior Middle Three examination and to recognize degrees from the Nanyang University and universities in Taiwan (Nanyang Siang Pao, July 3, 1972).

The enthusiasm for Chinese education in the form of Independent schools was clearly shown by the Chinese all over the country in 1973, when a campaign was launched to set up an Independent School Development Fund to 'preserve Chinese schools and education'. The response to the campaign to preserve Chinese Independent schools was very encouraging. The UCSCA in its annual meeting in September resolved unanimously to support the campaign whole-heartedly (Sin Chew Jit Poh, Sept, 10, 1973). A meeting of representatives of all Chinese guilds and associations in Perak also decided to 'support all efforts to raise funds for Independent Schools'. In the same meeting, the president of the UCSTA, Sim Mow Yu, stated that 'Independent schools are the forts for Chinese cultures; they should be strengthened to provide Chinese education for Chinese children' (The China Press, Sept. 14, 1973). He then urged the tin miners to contribute generously to the Independent Schools Development Fund.

Faced with various problems, Chinese education is, as one Chinese daily puts it, at a cross road (Editorial, Nanyang Siang Pao, July 5, 1972). Some Chinese are even more pessimistic. They regard the present campaign to preserve Chinese Independent schools as a desperate and futile attempt to save something that is 'gradually dying a natural death'. There is certainly some truth in the statement. Since 1962,

Chinese schools and their enrolment have been declining. With the present government's emphasis on the importance of Malay, many Chinese children are shifting their attention to learning Malay. As long as this policy continues, there is no reason to believe that the declining trend of Chinese schools will not continue.

We have indicated in the beginning of this chapter that education has been an important factor in communalism. As a matter of fact, communalism is one of the most intricate problems in Malaysia today affecting almost all aspects of Malaysian life. Because of this, we suggest to look into this problem in greater detail in our next chapter.



## CHAPTER 6

### THE RELATIONS BETWEEN CHINESE AND MALAYS

#### Introduction: The Pre-war Period

Prior to the Second World War, Sino-Malay relations had been reasonably satisfactory. There was occasional friction and conflict, but the keynote was communal harmony or the absence of animosity. The absence of animosity was the result of several factors. Mutual submission to Pax Britannica was one (Ratnam, 1965:42). As Silcock (1965:181) has put it, 'in many spheres of activity the different races were more concerned with their relations to the British, who co-ordinated the whole system, than with relations to one another'.

Secondly, there had been relatively little conflict of interests among the two communities. This was particularly true in the economic sphere where there was specialization of functions, with the Chinese largely engaging in commercial activities, and the Malays in agricultural pursuits. The two communities 'stood in complementary and not conflicting relations to one another', and neither 'had had any reason to step on the other's toes' (Ratnam, 1965:42).

The third factor that accounted for the relatively low intensity of communal conflict in the pre-war era was the different political orientations of the two communities.

Not only were the Chinese at that time an unorganized political force (Burridge, 1957:165), but they were also largely indifferent to local politics. Those who were interested in politics were mainly concerned with the political development in their homeland. The Malays, on the other hand, were more concerned with local politics, even though some were attracted to, and politically motivated by, the developments in Egypt, Turkey or Indonesia. As a result, the two communities were less inclined to regard each other as political protagonists (Means, 1970:44).

The relatively harmonious relations between the Chinese and the Malays before the war does not necessarily mean that racial tension did not exist. It only means that Sino-Malay tension and antagonism had not developed to such an extent as to produce an open conflict. Racial tension resulting from differences in language, religion, custom and economic imbalances has always existed. The point is that the tension between the communities was latent at the outbreak of the Second World War.

The Japanese Occupation of Malaya, as mentioned earlier in chapter 3, changed the pre-war race relations situation and brought racial antagonism to the surface. Because of its divide-and-rule policy, the Japanese made use of the Malay police force to fight the almost exclusively Chinese

resistance movement, leading to strong resentment on the part of the Chinese towards the Malays. Apart from the Japanese exploitation of racial differences, another factor which led to a deterioration in Sino-Malay relations was 'the prevailing sense of insecurity' which made people believe that they were safest among members of the same ethnic origin (Morrison, 1949:241).

The steady deterioration in Sino-Malay relations during the war years reached a climax immediately after the surrender of the Japanese, in the outburst of bitter communal clashes. During the interregnum between the surrender of the Japanese and the re-establishment of British authority, armed Chinese guerillas emerged from the jungle and started to pay off old scores against the Malays who collaborated with the Japanese. Serious but isolated racial outbreaks erupted in Johore,<sup>1</sup> Negri Sembilan and Perak (Gullick, 1969:100). Racial feelings were running high but in all these incidents responsible moderate leaders from both communities were able to exert their influence and mobilize opinion against violence.

#### Post-War Race Relations

While the racial feelings were prevented from running so wild as to be uncontrollable, it should be noted that no successful and effective steps have been taken towards removing the sources of conflict between the two communities.

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1. For a fairly detailed account of racial outbreaks in Johore, see Burridge (1957:151-168). The author attributed the communal clashes to the Chinese attack on Malay axioms.

Consequently, in the post-war and post-independence period, communal antagonism has, if anything, become more evident. This has been evidenced by communal outbreaks in 1957 (Penang), 1959 (Pangkor Island), 1964 (Singapore and Bukit Mertajam), 1967 (Penang), reaching a climax in the Kuala Lumpur riots of 1969.<sup>2</sup> The last-mentioned, because of its scale and impact, warrants some further elaboration. But before proceeding to that an attempt is made in what follows to examine the sources of Sino-Malay conflict. This is discussed under the following headings: political relationships, economic relationships and general social relationships.

#### Political Relationships

Politics in post-war Malaya has been a constant source of communal tension. The tension centres around the Malays' insistence on their predominant position in the government and administration of the country and the Chinese claims for increased political authority. The Malays firmly believe that as bumiputra, they have special rights to control the country's political life. Some Malays even went so far as to say that 'Malaya is for the Malays'.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, with the control of economic and commercial life by the non-Malays,

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2. For an account of the Singapore and Penang riots, see Leifer, (1964:1115-1121) and Snider (1968:960-975) respectively. The National Operations Council (1969: 15-20) provides a brief government version of the disturbances in Penang, Bukit Mertajam and Pangkor.
  3. It is interesting to note that among the Malays who made this statement is one none other than the former Prime Minister, Tengku Abdul Rahman. He once declared: "Malaya is for the Malays and it should not be governed by a mixture of races". On another occasion, the Tengku said: "It is understood by all that this country by its very name, its traditions and character is Malay". (Cf. Vasil, 1971:6).

the Malays feel imperative that they should have a pre-eminent position in the political power so as to offset the non-Malay economic power.

The Chinese, on the other hand, strongly feel that as citizens, they should have equal access to the government and administration of the country as the Malays. Their present position, as many rightly claim, is only that of the 'second-class citizens', since in civil administration, as well as in some other fields, they are discriminated against on the sheer ground of ethnicity.

It is these conflicting claims between the two communities that often produce communal antagonisms. As has been indicated earlier in chapter 4, the Alliance Party - a symbol of communal co-operation - was almost broken up in 1959 as a result of controversies over the allocation of seats among its components. In this instance, Chinese demand for one-third of the total seats in the Alliance was to ensure that their interests in the government could be proportionately and properly represented. But their demand met with strong opposition from the Malays represented by the UMNO who insisted that the MCA should not be given more seats than what they thought was necessary. Communal tension was generated by the MCA-UMNO crisis, but a showdown was avoided and a compromise reached largely as a result of the MCA making substantial concessions to the UMNO.

This brings us to the wider question of power relationship of the Chinese vis-a-vis the Malays. The 1959 Alliance crisis was but one example of the dependent power position of the Chinese in Malaysia and the reluctance of the Malays to extend further political power to the Chinese. Since the formation of the Alliance, the UMNO has maintained its pre-eminent position in the partnership, keeping the MCA and the MIC in a subordinate position. On this, a writer has commented that

It now became an important feature of UMNO strategy to keep the MCA weak enough (in terms of popular Chinese votes) so as to make it dependent on the UMNO and not enable it to make excessive demands on behalf of the Chinese community and at the same time popular enough among the Chinese to deliver the necessary votes, in addition to the larger UMNO vote, to retain the Alliance in power.

(Vasil, 1971:15).

Another writer, interestingly Tengku Abdul Rahman's biographer, has also commented on the dominant position of the UMNO in the Alliance Party:

... the Alliance is really made up of one principal party, the UMNO, with the MCA and the MIC as branches clothed with the intelligentsia and capitalist classes of each community. The MCA is not representative of the ... Chinese in the Federation, neither is the MIC of ... Indians. Neither of them has roots in the villages and small towns.

(Miller, 1959:216)

The dependent power position of the Chinese, however, is not confined to the Alliance Party set-up or the present National Front government. In other spheres, notably the civil service, the Armed Forces and the Police, Chinese dependence is also evident. Statistics on these are difficult to come by, but any observer (including the Malays) can easily be convinced that the Chinese role in these areas is insignificant. In the civil service, for example, the four to one quota in favour of the Malays bars many qualified Chinese. In the Armed Forces, the specially designed Malay Regiments close their doors to the Chinese and other non-Malays.

The most glaring fact about the Chinese dependent power relationship in the Malaysian society can be seen from their representation in the Cabinet. Of a total of thirty-four Ministers, their deputies and Parliamentary Secretaries in 1972, only five were Chinese (Straits Times, Dec. 29, 1972). In 1974, only eight (or less than 22%) of a total of thirty-seven Cabinet Ministers and Deputy Ministers were Chinese (Malaysian Digest, Sept. 6, 1974). More importantly, the ministerial posts held by the Chinese are relatively less important ones. Apart from this, both the Dewan Rakyat (House of Representatives) and Dewan Negara (Senate) have been dominated by Malays. All this means that any major or minor political decisions will have to be approved by the Malays.

This Malay dominance of political authority cannot but evoke fear, mistrust, and insecurity among the Chinese, many of whom see the strong political position of the Malays as a threat to their hard-won economic position.<sup>4</sup> This sense of insecurity has been particularly strong since the Kuala Lumpur riots which prompted the government to implement a number of pro-Malay policies avowedly to correct the Sino-Malay economic imbalance. The feeling of insecurity not only tends to draw the Chinese closer together but it also produces ethnic prejudice against the Malays.

Chinese resentment is further heightened by the constitutional guarantee of the special position of the Malays. To many, if not most Chinese, the seemingly permanent Malay Special Privileges are a gross injustice to say the least. In the public services, because of the discriminatory quotas, the top policy-making positions are dominated by the Malays. Many well-qualified Chinese find it difficult to enter the service while less-qualified Malay candidates are recruited. Those Chinese already in the service find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to obtain promotion, which is often

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4. Tan Siew Sin, MCA's president, was one of the many who brought out the question of insecurity among the Chinese. In his address to the MCA Annual Assembly, Tan Siew Sin said: "As president of the MCA, I receive a constant stream of grievances. Underlying all these grouses is that feeling of insecurity in regard to the future. Until 13th May, 1969, the Chinese felt that their preponderance in the economic field could make up for their weakness in the political field. Now they feel that they are not only politically handicapped, even their economic position is being steadily eroded". Cf. Straits Times, Sept. 3, 1972.



based more on ethnic consideration than objective performance standards, resulting in less qualified Malays to be placed in high administrative and policy-making positions. The outcome is a general low morale and frustration prevailing among the Chinese and Indian public servants. To some extent, therefore, as Means (1972:46-48) has rightly put it, the discriminatory quotas have contributed to a 'weakening of the legitimacy of the government' in the eyes of the Chinese as well as other non-Malays.

Not least significant in inciting communal feelings is the role played by the various political parties, particularly communal parties. Almost all the political parties in Malaysia have at one time or another seized some communal issues and exploited them to their own advantage. During the past election campaigns, exploitation of communal issues was a common feature. Such overtly Malay right-wing communal parties like the PMIP made no pretence at being communal and anti-Chinese. On the one hand it openly advocated the establishment of an Islamic state in Malaysia, which caused serious concern among the Chinese. On the other hand, the party exploited fears among the Malays that they would be overwhelmed by the non-Malays.

Other parties like the DAP and PPP were more subtle in their approaches. Both advocated equality for all irrespective of race. Having the bulk of their support from the Chinese community, however, these parties could not but capitalize on some communal issues in order to project themselves as the champions of the cause of the Chinese and other non-Malays. They raised the issues of multi-lingualism and the Malay Special Privileges, which inevitably antagonized the Malays. It is therefore hardly surprising that the Malays viewed the DAP and PPP with suspicion and feared them just as the Chinese feared (and they still do) the PMIP.

The Alliance Party, which claimed itself to be non-communal,<sup>5</sup> could not avoid playing on communal issues to secure support. In the 1969 election campaign, for example, in an attempt to discredit the DAP, it accused the party of being anti-Malay working to deprive the Malays of their rights. It also accused the DAP as an offshoot of Lee Kuan Yew's PAP in Singapore and described DAP's 'Malaysian Malaysia' concept as aiming at creating antagonism between the Malays and the non-Malays (Vasil, 1972:29).

In short, exploitation of communal issues - especially those pertaining to language and the Malay Special Privileges - and mutual allegations of communalism have been a common feature in Malaysian politics. This tends to incite fear

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5. The Alliance is basically a communal party or at best an inter-communal party, being made up of three communal components. Each of the component parties must appeal to its own supporters.

and communal hostility and serve as a constant source of irritation among the Chinese and the Malays.

A further source of conflict is the Chinese dissatisfaction and resentment over the Malays effort at electoral manipulation. This manipulation to ensure continued Malay pre-eminence in the country's politics have been touched on earlier in chapter 4. Constituency delimitation in favour of the Malay electors, the suspension of local-level electoral politics and the constitutional ban on certain fundamental issues affecting Chinese community all serve to remind the Chinese that there is no free and open electoral competition in a plural society like Malaysia.<sup>6</sup> They further reflect the intransigent attitude of the Malays in matters concerning their political power.

#### Economic Relationships

Two related aspects of the Malaysian economic structure are pertinent: one concerns the economic roles of the Chinese and the Malays, the other the economic imbalances between the two communities.

To a large extent, it is still true that economic roles in Malaysia are differentiated along communal lines. Broadly speaking, the Chinese are more urban-centred and vis-a-vis the Malays they dominate commerce, manufacturing, mining,

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6. In a study of politics in plural societies, Rabuskha and Shepsle (1971, 1972) report that 'free and open electoral competition may not be appropriate in the plural society' and 'democracy may be more than their (plural societies) citizens dare afford'.

construction, finance and the liberal professions.<sup>7</sup> The Malays, on the other hand, are overwhelmingly rural dwellers engaging in rice growing, fishing and small-holder rubber industry. They control the military service and the police force and are prominent in the government and administration especially in the civil service. In commerce and industries, the Malays are under-represented in comparison to their numbers. All in all, the general picture is one of occupational specialization along communal lines, which has contributed partly to the present racial economic imbalances.

There are four aspects of the Sino-Malay economic imbalances, namely income disparity, disparities between sectors of the economy, in economic status and in ownership. There is little doubt that the Sino-Malay income disparity remains wide. As has been indicated in chapter 2, both in terms of median and mean household incomes, the Chinese more than doubled the Malays in 1970, with the Malays predominating in the lowest income groups.

Between various sectors of the economy, the imbalances are more evident, even though the overall employment reflects the nation's racial composition. Unlike the Chinese, the Malays predominate in the poorer sectors of the economy. The Chinese account for about 65-66% (of the total employment)

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7. It should be remembered that the comparison is between the Chinese and the Malays only. In terms of ownership and control of the Malaysian economy as a whole, as has been indicated in chapter 2, the foreigners still have a significant influence.

in mining, commerce and manufacturing while the Malays constitute 67% of those employed in agriculture. More significantly, a great number of Malays engaged in agriculture are to be found in traditional activities with low productivity. In manufacturing a significant but unspecified proportion of the Malays are concentrated in wood products, cottage industries, agricultural processing and other low-wage activities, while a considerable proportion classified as engaged in commerce are petty retailers or itinerant traders in rural areas.

To exacerbate the situation a big proportion of the Malays are concentrated in the poorer occupations within each sector of the economy, being found mainly in the unskilled and semi-skilled categories and under-represented in professional, managerial and technical categories. To cite but one example, in 1970, as many as 46% of Malay employment in manufacturing was unskilled, compared with 26% for the Chinese. In the same sector, the Malays accounted for only 7% of the total employed in the managerial and professional section, as against 68% Chinese.

Another aspect of the economic imbalances lies in ownership. In the ownership of corporate agriculture and corporate industry (including manufacturing, mining and construction), the foreigners have a substantial share. They own 70.8% of corporate agriculture and 57.2% of corporate industry, compared with 29.2% and 42.8% respectively for all

Malaysians. Of this the Chinese hold 25.9% and 26.2% respectively while the share of the Malays is less than 1% in each.

In the ownership of share capital of limited companies, the situation is similar to the above. The foreigners have a dominant position, controlling slightly less than two-thirds. Among the local communities, the Chinese are the most prominent group, owning about 23% of the total as compared to a miserable 2% for the Malays.

This situation of economic imbalances between the Chinese and the Malays has always been a potential source of conflict between the two communities. It has become one of the most, if not the most important political issue of Malaysia today. More often than not, political discussions are centred around these imbalances and the ways in which these could be rectified in order to achieve racial harmony and national unity.

On the other hand, it is not uncommon to see the 'imbalance' issue being exploited by some communalist politicians. In such instances, the Sino-Malay economic imbalances are deliberately exaggerated while no reference is made as to the dominant position of the foreigners, especially the Europeans.<sup>8</sup> One possible consequence of

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8. One such politician is Mahathir bin Mohamad (1970), especially chapter 4, pp.32-61.

such deliberate instigations is a growing awareness of backwardness on the part of the Malays which in turn contributes to greater frustration and resentment, and even economic insecurity.<sup>9</sup>

### General Social Relationships

Several studies have revealed that there is little social interaction between Chinese and Malays, and that social separation between the two communities is rather pronounced. One reason for this probably lies in the fact that the two communities are physically segregated. Broadly speaking, the Chinese are concentrated on the west coast of the Peninsula and in urban centres while the Malays are found largely on the east coast and in the north. Chinese 'new villages' created in the first few years of the Emergency also served to divide the two communities into separate residential compartments.

The lack of social contact, however, is not due entirely to residential segregation. In a study of Chinese rural community, Newell (1962:39) finds that there is very little contact between the Chinese and the Malays even though both communities live in the same village of Treacherous River.

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9. In his investigation in Liverpool Richmond (1950:147-170) finds that ethnic prejudice is a function of three factors acting in conjunction, namely, the existence of two or more groups easily distinguishable from each other, the creation of false-stereotyped ideas and feelings of economic insecurity, the last-mentioned being the most important factor.

Nyce (1973:157) also notes that

Fellowship between the Chinese and people of other ethnic groups living nearby is... occasional and casual. Close cross-cultural friendships are rare, though contacts between individuals of different groups are superficially pleasant and little open antagonism has been witnessed.

Wilson (1967:24 & 29) in his study of a Malay village also observes that relations between urban Chinese and village Malays are highly selective and confined to economic relations only, and that there is little or no contact of any personal nature, and a lack of opportunity to develop such personal relationships.

While physical segregation to a certain extent tends to restrict social contact between the two communities, there are other important factors. One such factor is the distinct cultural differences between the Chinese and the Malays. Each community has its own culture and language, religion, and its own values and ways of life. Each is ethnocentric, thinking that its own culture is superior to the others.

In religion, the Malays are Muslims while the Chinese are not.<sup>10</sup> This makes intermarriage very difficult since Islam forbids the marriage of Muslims to non-Muslims. However, Islam does not prevent a person from becoming Muslim.

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10. The Chinese in Malaysia are noted for their eclecticism and tolerance in religious practice. They practice a variety of faiths, including Christianity and the Chinese system of supernatural belief, which is a combination of Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and ancestor worship. An insignificant number of Chinese are Muslims.



A Chinese is allowed to marry a Malay provided that he becomes a Muslim. But the conversion to Islam entails physical sacrifices from the converts, namely circumcision and prohibition of eating pork which is a favourite Chinese dish. Moreover, the convert has to adopt a Muslim name. This virtually means an acceptance of Malay customs over those of the Chinese in the eyes of other Chinese. The Chinese who marries a Malay thus faces the threat of ostracism from his own community. Islam therefore acts as a major barrier to inter-ethnic marriage as well as cultural and social integration among the two ethnic groups.

On the question of inter-marriage between Malays and Chinese, most scholars have concluded that the phenomenon is relatively rare.

One scholar, for example, states that:

As far as is known from the evidence available, intermarriage between Chinese and Malays in Malaya has not been frequent... The Chinese in Malaya have at no time been forbidden to convert to Islam or to marry Malays. Under British colonial rule no system of residential quarters for ethnic groups was set up, nor were there rigid official categories of 'European', 'foreign oriental' and 'Inlander' such as existed in Indonesia. Theoretically this means that the situation was more open in Malaya; despite this intermarriage and assimilation have not flourished.

(Edmonds, 1968:59)

Another scholar observes:

There is little intermarriage, because of the strong barrier of the Muslim religion. But where this barrier does not exist, Muslims who wish to conform to Malay custom and speak the Malay language are usually accepted as Malays, and intermarry with them freely.

(Silcock, 1965:180)

Islam, however, is not the only barrier to intermarriage. Reluctance to intermarry may be associated with the question of ethnic group identity. One who intermarries fears that he may lose his ethnic identity or will only gain marginal status in his group as well as in the spouse's group. This may in turn lead to feelings of insecurity.

Language differences acts as a further barrier between the two peoples. It creates communication problems and hinders the development of personal relationships. More importantly, however, language differences gives rise to the problem of language usage and its derivative problem of medium of instruction in schools. The question of language use and language instruction thus involves government policies and assumes its political importance. The debate over a policy of multi-lingualism versus Malay as the sole official language has been the main bone of contention between the two communities and has aroused intense communal feeling until very recently.<sup>11</sup>

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11. For a discussion of the language and education issue, see M. Roff (1967:316-328), Enloe (1968:372-385), Snider (1970:1070-1080).

Then there is the difference in values held by the two peoples. The values emphasized by both communities are in many instances opposite or incompatible. The typical Chinese is down-to-earth, materialistic, and places a premium on the acquisition of wealth either as an end in itself or as a means to social position. The typical Malay, on the other hand, places more emphasis on religious values and spiritual development of the individual. He does not 'chase money for the sake of the money' (Burridge, 1957:163).

To the Chinese, industriousness is a virtue worth striving for; the Malay, however, prefers to be 'easy-going'. The Chinese likes pork while to the Malay eating of pork is regarded as unclean and prohibited by his religion.

To these value differences must be added some racial stereotypes which are not uncommon in a plural society like Malaysia. Systematic information on racial stereotypes in Malaysia is lacking,<sup>12</sup> but an analysis of various economic, political, historical, anthropological and sociological studies reveals that racial stereotypes are abundant.<sup>13</sup> The Chinese generally believe that the Malays are lazy, stupid, lack achievement orientation and show a distaste for hard

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12. Recently, however, an attempt has been made to document group stereotypes by means of systematic survey materials. Cf. Rabushka (1971:709-716).

13. See, for example, the following works: Burridge (1957: 157, 163-4); Silcock (1965:183); Ness (1967:46); Tjoa (1963:3-15); Wilson (1967:25).

labour. The Malays, on the other hand, consider the Chinese to be industrious, intelligent, ambitious but dirty (ritually) and money-grabbing.

Differences in values and the presence of stereotyped ideas are likely to lead to ethnic prejudice and cause friction and delay the process of integration.<sup>14</sup>

It is clear from the foregoing that there are constant sources of conflict that are to be found in the political, economic and social structures of the plural society. Differences and contradictions are also present in the cultures and traditions of the various ethnic groups.

Since Independence Malaya has witnessed a radical change in the aspirations of both the Chinese and Malay communities, especially among the younger groups. Modern education has been an important factor in this development. It is gradually breaking down the traditional occupational dividing lines between the two communities. As Kennedy (1945:311) has rightly suggested, 'education would be dynamite for the rigid caste systems of colonies'. Young Malays influenced by education and information media, desire economic power and aspire to occupations which were previously out of their bounds, and largely the preserve of the Chinese. One

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14. Rabushka, however, suggests that 'stereotypes do not significantly influence social or political behaviour'. Cf. Rabushka (1971:716).

consequence of this is the development of direct conflict and sometimes fierce competition.

The young Chinese, unlike their fathers, are no longer interested exclusively in making material advancement. Increasingly, they demand greater participation in the government and administration of the country. They want a 'Malaysian Malaysia' (in contrast to a 'Malay Malaysia') in which all races enjoy equal treatment and equal rights.

In short, the aspirations of members of both communities have changed in such a way that they now, as Esman (1972:39) has aptly suggested,

increasingly aspire to similar goals and make competing demands on the political system. The original Alliance agreement that provided for a rough differentiation of roles is increasingly unacceptable to the younger generation of both races, yet the outlines of a revised distribution of roles which could be mutually acceptable has not emerged.

To compound the difficulty, neither community seems willing to give concessions to the other in matters concerning its vital interests. The young Chinese, while demanding greater political power, are reluctant to yield their economic position which they feel they and their fathers have achieved through great labour and industriousness; the young Malays who demand greater economic power are not willing to sacrifice Malay special privileges and political hegemony. As a consequence, the potential for conflict increases (Esman, 1972:39).

With all this said, it is reasonably safe to conclude that in Malaysia, due to its plurality, the potential for conflict has been very great. This is particularly so after Malaysia achieved its Independence, when with the departure of the colonial power, which previously acted as a balancing power, the two communities have to come face to face. In such a conflict-prone society, it takes only some minor incidents to trigger off communal riots. This has been proven in Malaysian history. The incidents in Pangkor and Bukit Mertajam, for example, all began with a fight between a Chinese and a Malay. A religious celebration provided the occasion for the Singapore riots in 1964. In the Penang riots of 1967, it was the currency devaluation that sparked off the disturbance. More recently, the Kuala Lumpur riot was triggered off by the 1969 general election results. To this latest event we will now turn.

## The Kuala Lumpur Riots of 1969

May 13, 1969 was a tragic day for Malaysia. On that day communal violence broke out in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's capital. Initially, the riots were confined to the capital city and its vicinity. Subsequently, however, they spread to other states, notably the west coast states of Penang, Perak, Malacca and Negri Sembilan. Serious rioting, arson and murder continued for several days before they were finally brought under control. Two days after the outbreaks, the government, realizing the gravity of the situation, declared a state of Emergency throughout the nation. Parliament was suspended and with it the Constitution.<sup>15</sup> An eight-man National Operations Council was set up to rule by decree. Malaysia was virtually under martial law.

Damage to property as a result of the riots was simply impossible to assess. As for the loss of life, official sources put the casualty figures at 196 dead, 439 injured, 1,019 reported missing and 9,143 arrested (National Operations Council, 1969:88-96). Of the 196 listed dead, 143 were Chinese. Unofficial estimates, however, put the death toll much higher.<sup>16</sup>

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15. Parliament was reinstated in February, 1971.

16. Slimming (1969:47-48) suggests that even a conservative estimate puts the death figure at over 800.

Almost everyone was shaken by the unprecedented scale of the riots. Tun Ismail, Minister for Home Affairs, sadly declared:

Democracy is dead in this country. It died at the hands of the opposition parties who triggered off the events leading to this violence.

(FEER, May 22, 1969:437)

The Prime Minister Tengku Abdul Rahman (1969:7) stated:

The whole nation suffered a profound shock, shaken to its very core.... May 13th, 1969 was a social and political eruption of the first magnitude.....

Tun Razak, Director of the National Operations Council wrote:

May 13, 1969 will go down in our history as a day of national tragedy. On that day the very foundation of this Nation was shaken by racial disturbances whose violence far surpassed any we had known.

(National Operations Council, 1969:iii).

There are controversial accounts as to why, how, and by whom the notorious riots were started.<sup>17</sup> What is clear is that the outbreak originated directly from the post-election 'victory parades' by opposition parties, predominantly Chinese, and a scheduled counter-demonstration by the more extreme elements of the UMNO, the Malay wing of the Alliance Party.

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17. For details see Slimming (1969), National Operations Council (1969) and Tengku Abdul Rahman (1969).



The government's initial reaction to the riots was characteristic; to put the blame on the communists. Later, however, some government spokesmen shifted away from this initial position and accused the opposition parties. Still later, the blame was put on the Chinese secret societies and communal extremists.<sup>18</sup> In Malaysia, all these terms - communist, opposition party, secret society and communal extremist - did not have much difference in meanings. They all meant Chinese. To point the finger of blame at these categories of people was as good as blaming the Chinese and could only evoke resentment on the latter.

The root causes of the disturbances, however, should not be overlooked. These are to be found in several decades of communal suspicion, mistrust, and discontent; in economic disparity and jealousy, in conflicting political claims and in social and cultural diversities - all of which we have indicated earlier. The tension between the two peoples, so to speak, had already been there. All it needed was a spark. The General election and events immediately preceding and following it provided the spark for the tragic violence.

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18. Tun Ismail accused the opposition parties 'who triggered off the events leading to this violence'. He later explained: "Everybody thought that the communists were responsible for the disturbances. Later we found that they were as much surprised as we were". See Straits Times, June 21, 1969. Tengku Abdul Rahman, however, did not change his initial position, and maintained that the communists were behind the riots. Cf. Tengku Abdul Rahman (1969:181), NOC (1969:25-27, 77-78) and Straits Times, May 19 and June 14, 1969.

The 1969 general election campaign was conducted in a highly charged atmosphere in which communal issues were predominant. Almost without exception, every party made racial appeals in order to gain electoral support. The Alliance, which had ruled the country since 1955, was especially under strong attack. Its senior partner, the UMNO, was accused by the PMIP for selling out Malay interests to the Chinese; the MCA was attacked (by the DAP in particular) for being unable to fight for Chinese interests such as multi-lingualism; the MIC came under attack for its subservient and ineffective role in the Alliance (Snider, 1970:71).

The Alliance, in its counter-attack, branded the predominantly Chinese DAP as 'anti-Malay' and PMIP as 'anti-Chinese' and accused the latter of having connections with the communists near the Thai border (Straits Times, April 15, 1969). The PPP, a Perak based predominantly non-Malay party, was also branded by the Alliance as a Chinese communal party attempting to destroy Malay rights. It is significant to note that the Alliance, while accusing the opposition of using communal appeal, had done very much the same thing.

A substantial part of the attacks, counter-attacks, allegations and counter-allegations was essentially centred around three communally sensitive issues: the education-language issue, the citizenship issue and the Malay Special Rights, all of which tended to arouse strong communal feelings and lead to intense polarization.

In the tension-filled atmosphere of heated political campaigning, an incident of some significance occurred. In Kepong, near Kuala Lumpur, a Chinese Labour Party youth was killed by the police on May 4, 1969 while painting anti-election slogans. This incident of unnecessary police brutality was resented by many Chinese.<sup>19</sup>

The funeral took place on May 9, the eve of the polling day. Permission for the funeral procession to be held in Kuala Lumpur was given by the police who specified that the procession should follow certain routes. However, as things turned out, an estimated 3,000<sup>20</sup> strong procession (mostly Chinese) filed through the heart of Kuala Lumpur, ignoring police instruction, chanting communist slogans and waving communist banners and flags.

The police exercised 'highest restraint' and no attempt was made to disrupt the procession despite its defiance of police instruction. What could have turned into an ugly situation was carefully handled. Nevertheless, the incident may have contributed in generating fears in the Malays and led to their later over-reaction. The Malays felt that 'if the Chinese can so flaunt their Chineseness in the nation's capital now, what will happen to us if they do ever take over the State Government as they threaten' (Reid: 1969:266-7).

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19. The police asserted that they shot the youth, Lim Sun Seng in self-defence. This assertion was derided since the youth was shot through the head from behind. Cf. Slimming (1969:16).
  20. The NOC estimated that 10,000 people took part in the procession. The police estimate, according to Slimming (1969:16-17), was 'never more than 3,000 people'. Also see NOC (1969:27-28).

The general election was held on May 10. The results, as indicated earlier, came as a great surprise, and 'shocked' many Alliance leaders. The Alliance was returned to power, but with a reduced majority. It only captured 48.4% of the total votes compared to 58% in 1964. Three of the party's ministers were defeated. In the State elections, the party lost Penang (to Gerakan) and Kelantan (retained by PMIP). In Perak, the Alliance also lost its overall control. The result in Selangor was a deadlock, the Alliance and the opposition each securing 14 seats.

The opposition parties, especially the DAP, Gerakan and PPP, all predominantly Chinese, had substantial gains. The DAP won 13 seats, the Gerakan 8 and the PPP 4. What was more significant about the result, however, was the increased tendency for the newly-elected members in some state Assemblies to divide into opposing groups along communal lines, namely Malay government and non-Malay opposition. This feature was undoubtedly potentially dangerous (Reid, 1969:264).

Of the Alliance partners, the MCA suffered the most severe setback. Only 13 out of its 33 candidates were returned. The shocking defeat prompted its leaders to decide on May 13 to withdraw from the government. A MCA

statement read:

The Chinese community have rejected the Malaysian Chinese Association as their representatives in the government... As politicians practising parliamentary democracy, the MCA must accept this to be the case. Thus there is no other course for the MCA than to withdraw from participation in the government.

(Straits Times, May 14, 1969).

The MCA would, the statement added, 'remain in the Alliance' but would not accept any appointment in the Federal Cabinet or State Executive Councils. This was stunning news to many. For the first time since Malaysia's Independence, the Chinese community would not be represented in the government.<sup>21</sup>

The MCA's decision, although not directly connected with the outbreak of the riots, had the effect of increasing subsequent tension. This was particularly true among some Malay leaders who believed that the MCA had betrayed the Alliance and was joining the opposition for Chinese power (Reid, 1969:264). To the Chinese, the MCA decision served to contribute to the atmosphere of confusion and uncertainty.

Opposition parties were jubilant over their electoral success and the fact that the Alliance was reduced to a simple majority in Parliament. Filled with excitement and

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21. Later, however, the MCA compromised its original position to take part in the Emergency Cabinet. Three of its leaders were appointed Ministers with special functions.

exuberance, both Gerakan and DAP supporters (mostly non-Malays) held 'victory parades' on May 11 and 12. In the course of the marches, it was reported that some insults and obscenities were hurled at the Malay community as a whole.<sup>22</sup>

Meanwhile the UMNO was planning its own massive demonstration 'to teach the Chinese a lesson'. The demonstration was to begin from the residence of the Selangor Menteri Besar, Dato Harun bin Idris (who was also the UMNO state Chairman) on the evening of May 13. In connection with this, it was reported that groups of Malays were already gathering in Kampong Bahru on May 11 and 12 in order to take part in the May 13 demonstration. Many of these people who arrived from outlying areas were armed with knives, parang and spears (Slimming, 1969:26). Violence was clearly thought to be a possibility by these would-be participants. According to Reid (1969:268), "many of those who marched to join the rally from outlying areas wore the white headband of mourning around their songkoks, a symbol which was also used in 1946 when the Malays were mobilized to fight British plans to remove the sovereignty of the Malay Sultans".

The UMNO demonstration never took place. The tension was so high that before the demonstration, a group of emotional would-be participants from Gombak, on their way

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22. According to police and other eye-witnesses, the demonstration shouted such anti-Malay abusive remarks (in Malay) as: "Malays go back to their kampong", "Malays go and die", "This is not a Malay country", "End of the Malays" and "Sack all Malay policemen". Cf. NOC (1969:29-35).

to the Menteri Besar's residence had a clash with the Chinese and Indians at Setapak (NOC, 1969:44; Tengku A. Rahman, 1969:94). News of the clash reached the Menteri Besar's residence where thousands of Malays had already gathered. The crowd soon disintegrated into a rioting mob killing passing Chinese and burning cars and shop-houses. Within a short while violence broke out in various parts of the capital. Kuala Lumpur, as the Prime Minister put it, 'was a city on fire'. (Tengku A. Rahman, 1969:91).

#### The Aftermath

We have earlier noted in chapter 4 that the riots have politically resulted in the emergence of a 'constrained democracy' where discussion on certain communally sensitive issues is constitutionally proscribed. In terms of race relations, the effect of the riots has been equally far reaching. The riots, to be sure, have tended to polarize the population on ethnic lines. Each group tends to retreat to the confines of its communal boundary where fears and anxieties are shared. Inter-group trust has been eroded almost to the vanishing point.

Moreover, the alleged partiality shown by the army which had been called in to maintain law and order was bitterly resented by the Chinese.<sup>23</sup> The army's action has undermined

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23. This was particularly true of the Royal Malay Regiments, which consisted exclusively of Malays. It was reported that 'the curfew was rigorously enforced against the Chinese, while the Malays were allowed to roam the streets at will'. A number of foreign correspondents saw soldiers from the Royal Malay Regiment firing into Chinese shop-houses without any apparent reasons. Malay soldiers were also biased in favour of the Malays in the distribution of food and relief supplies. Cf. Slimming (1969:36-37; 49-51); FEER, May 22, 1969, p.438.

the Chinese faith and confidence in the government's impartiality and willingness to protect their lives and properties. Many Chinese realize after the riots that in times of communal clash, the presence of the military is not always a guarantee that they would be safe.

The increasingly pro-Malay policies adopted by the government after the racial riots tend to disillusion and alienate the Chinese further. Widespread unemployment and a feeling of being unjustly treated are driving an increasing number of young Chinese into the arms of secret societies and the communists. The present government's imaginary threat of a communist insurgency may become real one day.

As long as Malaysia remains a plural society, and as long as one community is more equal than the others, communal tension will remain a feature of the society for a long time. However, a riot as serious as the 1969 riots is thought to be unlikely. The reason is not because communal tensions have abated, but because very few would find a vested interest in a violent showdown. Moreover, the government is more vigilant than ever and is aware of the possible international repercussions in the event of fresh riots.



## CHAPTER 7

### THE PROBLEMS OF NATIONAL UNITY

We have thus far analysed the colonial social structure in Malaysia, various important aspects of the Chinese community as well as the relations between Chinese and Malays. In so doing we have drawn attention to the fact that there are constant sources of conflict among the two major ethnic groups in Malaysia - economically, politically, educationally and socially.

Given the tremendous amount of diversities and conflict in the plural society of Malaysia, the question which we should address ourselves is: what actually binds the society together? Before we attempt to answer this question, we should first consider briefly whether or not the various institutions of the Chinese community we have discussed resist integration or assimilation.

#### Chinese Community and Integration

At a glance, it would appear that Chinese institutions and their related values give the community a separatist character leading to not the elimination, but the perpetuation of race relations problems. Indeed, this is the view of those who expect complete assimilation of the Chinese, in the sense of losing their Chinese identity. However, if one

is to look at the Chinese 'problem'<sup>1</sup> more closely and objectively, one would find that the presence of Chinese institutions per se does not necessarily generate conflict or problems. The problems arise largely because there is a lack of understanding and tolerance between different ethnic groups and because different ethnic groups have different aspirations as well as conflicting views of what assimilation or integration means.

The Malays expect of the Chinese a fundamental change in the Chinese way of life and true identification with the political, economic and social interests of the nation. To the Chinese, true identification with the Malaysian nation may be possible - as many have already done so. But to change the Chinese way of life fundamentally to the extent of losing their Chinese identity is certainly further than many wish to go or think it necessary to go. After all, to the Chinese, they can co-exist with any racial group and the Chinese way of life does not in any way interfere with this co-existence.

It is in this light that we look at some of the Chinese institutions. Let us begin with the various Chinese guilds and associations which are prevalent in all overseas Chinese communities. As we have seen in chapter 1, these guilds and associations serve various purposes both within the

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1. The characterization of the Chinese as a 'problem' is for convenience only. No derogatory value judgement is intended.

Chinese community itself as well as the nation at large. Within the community itself, the complex of guilds and associations has enabled the Chinese to live a self-contained and self-satisfying community life within a traditional framework (Wan, 1967:87). Outside the community these associations sometimes serve as the spokesman or 'go-between' between the Chinese on the one hand and the other ethnic groups on the other. The presence of these ethnic organizations in a plural society obviously tends to draw one ethnic group away from another preventing inter-ethnic interactions. Furthermore, being exclusively Chinese, very little about these organizations is known to other ethnic groups. The impression that other ethnic groups get is that Chinese 'stick together'. Their 'sticking' together is based not on special interests but on the mere fact that they are Chinese. This has been a major source of irritation between the Chinese and other ethnic groups. It has also led to some amount of racial prejudice and stereotype.

In the case of Chinese participation or 'domination' in the economy, many controversies have been raised, one of which being the question of whether or not the Chinese really control the economy of Malaysia. This question has been discussed in chapter 2 in which it was shown that the Chinese are far from dominating or controlling the Malaysian economy. Malaysian economy, contrary to the belief of many laymen, is still largely in the hands of foreign capitalists.

However, what is really important is not whether the Chinese control the economy. The important point is that most of the Malays - those who occupy the lower socio-economic stratum in particular - believe this to be true. And this is all that matters because it is this belief that often determines their negative attitude towards the Chinese.

Chinese business enterprise, with its informal organization and familism, often works to exclude Malay participation. In addition, there is a well-founded belief among the Malays that Chinese traders tend to form a tight ring, with its private channels of communication and intelligence, into which the non-Chinese can hardly break (Hunter, 1966:43-44). This belief tends to reinforce their prejudice and may even fan the economic jealousy already existing among certain groups.

Politics is another breeding ground for conflict in a plural society. There are several facets of politics which generate communal tensions between the Chinese and the Malays. One is the conflicting claims between the two communities with regards to political power: the Malays insistence to have a pre-eminent position in the country's government and administration on the one hand and the Chinese attempt to secure a bigger share in political authority on the other.

A second facet is the role played by the Chinese political parties. Their focus on certain racial issues arouses communal feelings not only among the Chinese but also among the Malays. Two racial issues commonly raised by Chinese political parties are multi-lingualism and the Malay Special Rights. Both issues arouse emotions and communal hostility. The Chinese feel that the government is doing too much for the Malays. They advocate equality for all citizens irrespective of racial origins. The Malays, on the other hand, fear that they would be overwhelmed by the non-Malays if equality is given to them. Fears are generated in both communities and each views the other's political parties with suspicion.

Chinese involvement with the clandestine Malaysian Communist Party is another facet of the communal problems. Here again, the fact that only a handful of Chinese are involved in communist activities is not so important. The important point is that the Malays believe that most of the Chinese are or can be communists or their sympathizers. This belief, though illogical and unfounded, has nonetheless played a part in determining the Malay attitude towards the Chinese. Chinese are believed to be untrustworthy and not infrequently they are regarded as having some form of connection with communism or still looking towards mainland China.

In the political arena, therefore, there are constant sources of friction. As long as the present political system persists, and as long as communal parties still appeal to the respective communities, there is no reason to believe that the sources of friction will diminish, let alone disappear. For this reason, the process of integration will also be delayed - not by the presence of Chinese political organizations alone, but equally responsible are the political institutions and activities of the Malays.

The one single issue which generates most debates and controversies, and arouses most intense communal feelings is education which has been discussed in detail in chapter 5. We wish only to emphasize here that opinions of the Chinese and Malays differ in matters regarding education policy and language. To the Malays, communal harmony and national unity can better be achieved through a national education policy with Bahasa Malaysia as the sole medium of instruction. Thus, the insistence on the part of the Chinese to perpetuate Chinese schools and language is seen by the Malays as chauvinistic and contravenes the national education policy. To the Chinese, the education policy of the Malay-dominated government which gives top priority to Bahasa Malaysia is an all-out effort to eliminate Chinese education and language in Malaysia. Both communities regard each other as chauvinistic and interestingly both are determined to defend their mutually exclusive communal interests. Under such circumstances of communal rivalry, there is little hope that integration will occur.

The various aspects of Chinese institutions and organizations, their political and economic activities, as we have seen so far, do seem to make the Chinese a self-reliant and self-contained community. The perpetuation of such a Chinese identity in the Malaysian plural society has created many problems. In the eyes of the Malays, for instance, the Chinese are an unassimilable lump because they care too much about their own culture and institutions. One way to assimilate them is, according to some racial bigots, to make them forget the Chinese language and dialects and speak only Malay.

The Chinese, like any other racial group, love their culture, institutions and organizations, which they have built up through years of hardship with little support from the government. To many of them, their institutions have all the rights to co-exist with those of the indigenous people. They certainly do not see that their institutions will in one way or another hinder integration among the various communities. To the accusation that Chinese ethnic organizations tend to perpetuate Chinese identity and resist integration, the Chinese would reply by saying that Malay institutions and organizations could create similar problems. Here again, each community feels that the other's institutions are undesirable. There seems to be no end to such conflicting view points. Little do the two communities realize that communal institutions and organizations are natural phenomena

or even permanent features in a plural society which can be lived with. What is really important and which can render the conflict less painful is the attitude of give-and-take and a thorough understanding of each other's cultures and institutions. In a plural society with diverse cultures, only accommodation and compromise between the various groups can make the system viable.

### Unifying Factors

Given the numerous divisive forces in plural societies, we now return to the very fundamental question posed earlier, namely, what actually bind together the various segments in the society? It is most appropriate here to explore the thesis advanced by M.G. Smith with regards to the dynamics of colonial social systems. According to Smith, plural colonial societies are held together by the political domination of one cultural segment, usually the metropolitan power. The withdrawal of colonial power together with its political institutions which held the society together gives rise to several possibilities.

In the first place, following the attainment of political independence, one dominant segment in the society may succeed the colonial power in wielding political power. In the second place, there is a danger that the society may



eventually break up. Thirdly, there is the possibility of the emergence of a neo-colonial situation in which the continuance of metropolitan economic domination keeps the various ethnic groups working together in the same industries.<sup>2</sup>

As Rex (1974b:20-21) has rightly indicated, it is almost impossible only three decades after the beginning of the post-colonial era to validate or invalidate Smith's thesis that the withdrawal of the colonial power from colonial societies would threaten their continued existence. Sufficient historical cases could be produced both to show that post-colonial societies are fraught with racial conflict which appears to be increasing, and that some post-colonial societies are emerging as multi-racial nations.

The case of Malaysia is interesting. In the first place, the Malays who constitute slightly over half of the total population have taken over political power from the colonial regime since Independence in 1957. That the Malays became the successor of political power of the colonizer was no accident at all. It had been planned by the British colonial regime. Secondly, what we see in Malaysia today is essentially a social system of capitalist neo-colonialism in which, as we saw earlier, the bulk of

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2. Cf. M.G. Smith (1965), Smith & Kuper, (1969), Rex (1974a and b).

the national wealth continues to be controlled by foreign capitalists. Neo-colonialism despite its many undesirable qualities, serves the latent function of involving workers of various racial origin in the same industries, binding them together to some extent.

Thus, in so far as Malaysia is concerned, the succession of political power by one cultural segment and the emergence of neo-colonialism seem to be in line with Smith's thesis. However, Smith's prediction of the eventual breakup of colonial societies still need time to be validated. Many colonial plural societies are riven with racial conflict. Yet none had completely broken up. Malaysia did plunge into a national chaos at the time of the communal riots in 1969. A nation-wide state of Emergency was declared and Parliament was suspended following the riots. With the suspension of Parliament and certain civil liberties, the whole nation was virtually placed under martial law.

However, the chaotic conditions of riots and arsons did not last very long. Within a couple of weeks order was restored and the security situation was under control although rumours and tensions still abounded. Within less than a year, Parliament was reinstated.

The communal riots of 1969 in Malaysia serve to illustrate two important points. First, democratic politics is inherently unstable in plural societies given the salience of communal issues.<sup>3</sup> The second point which is

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3. For a systematic account of the patterns of democratic instability in plural societies, see Rabushka & Shepsle (1971 and 1972).

related to the first, is that independence in most cases does not automatically resolve the conflict between the indigenous people and the immigrant population in plural societies, and that any bid to capture political power by the latter may well lead to serious riots or even to their violent extermination (Rex, 1970a:75). To say this however is not to show complete agreement with Smith as regards his thesis of the eventual breakup of plural societies; it is merely to note the instability of the plural social systems.

It should be noted, nonetheless, that despite the tremendous amount of conflict in post-colonial plural societies, there also exist some amount of national unity and integration. Smith has suggested political institutions to be the sole binding factor. That the political institutions play an important role in binding together the various ethnic segments in Malaysia is a fact few can dispute. The political institutions that have developed in Malaysia are in some sense unique. In the first place, the whole political system is a blending of traditional Malay political institutions with western democracy.<sup>4</sup> As a result of this, many of the elements in the traditional Malay political system still remain today. These include, among others, the institution of the Sultanate with its role

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4. For a detailed analysis of the indigenous Malay political institutions see Gullick (1958).

in systems of symbolism and status. Under the parliamentary system, the sultans exercise little real power. However, as in the case of the traditional Malay society, the sultan still enjoys a position of great dignity and is still regarded as the symbol of unity in each state. The sultan's role in the system of status looks more like increasing than decreasing. He is still the titular source of rank for members of the royal family as well as the rakyat (commoners). This can be illustrated by the large numbers of people who are conferred titles every year on the occasion of the sultans' birthdays.

The Malaysian political system is unique in another sense. This refers to the formation of the National Front government in 1971 which brought together the major parties in Malaysia at both Federal and State levels. This coalition has not only facilitated inter-party co-operation but also reduced the strength of the opposition. Opinions vary as to the reasons behind the coalition. Some political leaders have attributed the formation of the National Front government to a genuine desire of the parties concerned to consolidate political stability and national unity. Others have doubted that coalition politics would ever promote national unity. They accused the UMNO of the desire towards the establishment of a one-party state through the elimination of all opposition parties, either by absorption or suppression.<sup>5</sup>

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5. This view was expressed by Lim Kit Siang, Secretary-General of the DAP. Cf. The Democratic Action Party of Malaysia, "Coalition Politics in Malaysia: The DAP View", Kuala Lumpur (n.d.).

There seem to be some elements of truth in both the opinions. But both are equally difficult to prove or disprove. What does seem to be clear, however, is the apparent decrease in the amount of politicking after the coalition.

These two unique features of the Malaysian political system somehow serve to bind the various segments together. Earlier, we have in fact drawn attention to the fact that politics as a process can be very divisive. Both of these observations are true in Malaysia. They are in no way contradictory. Politics has the potential of both dividing or unifying people, depending on the circumstances. It is for this reason that Smith's thesis of the political institutions as the sole binding force in plural societies is untenable. Rex, too, takes exception to Smith's view but for different reasons. According to Rex, in so far as political domination is the binding factor, it is very weak. The reason is simply that power begets its own opposition, and that if that opposition is externally supported, it cannot be suppressed forever (Rex, 1974a:173).

Apart from political institutions, one very important factor that serves to maintain unity in plural societies is the institutions of the economy or the social relations of production.<sup>6</sup> The Malaysian case is again very unique. To begin with, various ethnic groups participate in the laissez

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6. This point has been repeatedly stressed by Rex (1970a: 58; 1974a:173).

faire capitalist economy, even though there is imbalance in the involvement of ethnic groups in certain sectors of the economy, such as there are more Chinese than Malays in the retail trade. But the general picture is one of involvement of all ethnic groups in the same type of industries - as fishermen, rubber tappers, factory workers and many others. To a large extent, involvement of the ethnic groups in the economic institutions tend to bind them together. Integration, for instance, can and does occur in the factories, on the rubber estates or in the fishing villages. Moreover, there is increasing co-operation and collaboration at different levels of economic activities, and this tends to strengthen inter-ethnic ties.

More importantly, the dysjunction between the economic power of the Chinese on the one hand, and the political power of the Malays on the other, functions to maintain some form of unity. The dysjunction strikes a balance between the two communities, so that both have some bargaining power and none risks to go beyond what it thinks to be the limit.

We do not, however, claim that the political and economic institutions are the only unifying forces in Malaysia. In point of fact, both political and economic institutions have their dysfunctional aspects. The history of Malaysia has so far shown that the various communities have often quarrelled over the distribution of political and

economic power. On some occasions conflict was so intense that it threatened to break up the whole social system. On others, conflict was avoided as a result of compromises between the conflicting parties.

There are, to be sure, other forces that contribute to the maintenance of unity in Malaysia. One such force is the common experiences and characteristics derived from membership in the same trade unions, youth clubs and certain cultural organizations. The struggle for independence, the creation of Malaysia and the defence against Indonesian confrontation were also integrative forces which brought the people together. With this said, it is important to note some of the deliberate attempts by the government to foster unity and integration among the people. These attempts include the establishment of the national education policy, the New Economic Policy, the Rukunegara, the National Unity Board and the Rukun Tetangga.

We have earlier touched on the New Economic Policy with its possible effects, and the education policy of making Bahasa Malaysia the sole medium of instruction. We wish to add that, in the case of the New Economic Policy, which was incorporated in the Second Malaysia Plan 1971-75, its long-term effects could be very rewarding and that an integrated and just society could well be achieved if the plans for development are properly implemented. The New Economic Policy has set itself two main tasks, namely, to

eradicate poverty irrespective of race and restructure society. But at the moment it appears that the plan period now ending has seen the second objective better fulfilled than the first. There are indications that massive efforts to assist the Malays have not been matched by plans to help the non-Malays. This has caused a lot of resentment among the latter.

Education remains a tricky and sensitive subject in Malaysia. However, there are signs of non-Malays accepting - albeit unwillingly among certain sections - Bahasa Malaysia as the National Language and the sole medium of instructions in schools and institutions of higher learning. Increasing numbers of candidates are sitting for the Bahasa Malaysia examinations every year. Even commercial and business establishments are beginning to pay more attention to the use of Bahasa Malaysia as a means of communication. All this certainly means that, in the near future, Bahasa Malaysia may serve as a common factor binding the people together.

One aspect of the government's education policy has been to correct the imbalance in educational advancement between the Malays and non-Malays, by offering more opportunities for advancement to the former. One way to do this, as the government has been doing, is to impose



quotas for local university entrance in favour of the Malays. The non-Malays have generally accepted this policy in something like good faith. The imbalance, they feel, needs to be rectified if there is to be peace and harmony. Chinese high regard for learning was little deterred by the imposition of quotas in local universities in favour of the Malays. As an alternative, many sent their children abroad for education.

Two recent developments, however, have upset the Chinese and other non-Malays. One is that private students who wish to go abroad for further education have to obtain prior approval and 'sponsorship' from the Malaysian Ministry of Education. The grant of sponsorship involves some red-tape and its introduction has been interpreted by the non-Malays as an attempt to discourage them from going abroad for further studies.

The second development is the announcement made by the Minister of Education Dr. Mahathir Mohamad that future students going abroad might have to be registered. This announcement was made soon after demonstrations by some Malaysian students in Australia and New Zealand against the Prime Minister during his official visits there some time in 1975.<sup>7</sup> Registration is believed to aim at weeding out what the government regards as 'undesirable' students - especially those who are anti-government.

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7. No one is absolutely clear about the reasons behind the demonstrations. One report says that 'it was very much undergraduate love for causes'. But a leaflet distributed during one of the demonstrations demanded, among other things, the release of Malaysian political prisoners and an end to surveillance. Cf. Far Eastern Economic Review (November 14, 1975:13-14).

So far the registration proposals have not been implemented. But the announcement has upset many non-Malays who have looked abroad as a fair alternative to educate their children. The worry now is that they may even be deprived of this alternative which they feel they have worked for (FEER, No. 14, 1975:14).

In an attempt to bring the people closer together after the shock of the May 13 tragedy, the government issued in 1970 a statement of fundamental national principles, called the Rukunegara.<sup>8</sup> Since its enunciation, the Rukunegara has been given something like the status of a national ideology. The Rukunegara Declaration reads as follows:

Our nation, Malaysia, being dedicated to  
achieving a greater unity of all her peoples;  
to maintaining a democratic way of life; to  
creating a just society in which the wealth of  
the nation shall be equitably shared; to  
ensuring a liberal approach to her rich and  
diverse cultural traditions; to building a  
progressive society which shall be oriented to  
modern science and technology; WE, the peoples,  
pledge our united efforts to attain these ends  
guided by these principles;

Belief in God  
Loyalty to King and Country  
Upholding the Constitution  
Rule of Law  
Good Behaviour and Morality.

The 'ends' as spelt out in the Declaration cannot be disputed by anyone who is in favour of national harmony and unity. As can be seen clearly, these ends include almost all that is required for a modern, progressive society - unity, democracy, justice, equality, liberality and an emphasis on science and technology.

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8. Rukunegara is formed from two Malay words: Rukun which means 'basic principles' or the five pillars of Islam and negara which means 'state' or 'nation'. The term is now translated into English as the National Ideology or the Pillars of the Nation.

What can be disputed, however, are the five 'guiding principles' for attaining these ends. These principles seem to be nothing more than the obligations of a citizen. If strictly adhered to, they might produce large numbers of 'good' citizens. But to strive for equality and national unity requires more than merely the five principles. As we shall see later, what is urgently needed is the removal of the sources of conflict and a rapidly expanding economy in which there are ample economic opportunities for all citizens, irrespective of their racial origin.

Another deliberate attempt to foster unity is the setting up of the Ministry of National Unity, now known as the National Unity Board. Since its formation in 1969, little has been known about its functions and activities. No serious research, for example, has so far been carried out by the Board to look into the problem of national unity.<sup>9</sup> The dialogue sessions organized by the Board from time to time are highly selective and restricted to a small group of people only.<sup>10</sup> There is therefore an urgent need for the

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9. The Board publishes a half-yearly journal called Negara whose circulation is very limited.

10. The writer and a few colleagues from the Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia once corresponded with the Chairman of the Unity Board expressing their interest in attending some of the dialogue sessions. There was no positive response from the Board. The incident gives the writer the impression that the dialogue sessions are confined to some groups of selected people only.

Board to change its present state of affairs, and look more seriously and systematically into the problems facing the nation, especially those aspects that affect inter-ethnic relations. For a start, the Board could work closely with the institutions of higher learning to carry out some specific research projects.

The latest move by the government to foster community togetherness is the formation of the Rukun Tetangga scheme.<sup>11</sup> Under the scheme, multi-racial vigilante corps have been formed in many big towns to look after the security of their local communities. The government has announced its intention to introduce the scheme throughout the nation. Participation in the scheme is compulsory for males aged between eighteen and fifty-five.

It is still early to assess how effective this 'compulsory togetherness' can be in fostering solidarity among the people. According to press reports, the majority of the vigilantes take the exercise seriously. Only a small minority is shirking its duties.<sup>12</sup>

This is obviously a good sign and a good beginning. But to ensure the success of the scheme, both in terms of helping the police in maintaining law and order in the community and in terms of fostering togetherness among people

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11. Rukun Tetangga has been translated into English as 'pillars of the community'. It is sometimes referred to as 'community self-reliance'.

12. This minority can be divided into three categories: those who completely ignore the patrol or guard duties; those who treat it as a game and those who answer the call of duty very reluctantly. See New Sunday Times, Feb. 29, 1976.

of various ethnic origins, more has to be done to improve the organization of the scheme on a nation-wide scale. Already there have been complaints that there is a lack of supervision by the Rukun Tetangga Secretariat of the functions of the appointed sector committees. This has resulted in an unequal distribution of duties: some residents being given more duties while others have not been called for duty at all. This shortcoming should be remedied to enable the residents carry out their duties effectively.

The present skeleton staff in the Rukun Tetangga Secretariat is insufficient to cope with the vast amount of organizational and supervisory work involved. The government should set up a special department, adequately staffed with experienced personnel, to look after the scheme.

It is interesting to note a feature common to many of these deliberate attempts to promote unity. This is that the Rukunegara, the Rukun Tetangga, the New Economic Policy and the National Unity Board were all set up after 1969 - the year of the racial riots. This is an indication of the government's grave concern over the problem of national unity. To a certain degree these attempts also reflect the government's determination to build a truly united nation. There is little doubt about that. The government, however, has obviously overlooked two important things. One is that some of these measures, for instance, policies with regards to economic and educational opportunities, are

blatantly in favour of one particular community, namely, the Malays. This can only evoke resentment from other groups. Indeed, there are indications that many young Chinese and Indians have already been alienated by such discriminatory policies.

The second point is that many remedial measures fail to take into account the real sources of conflict between the Malays and the non-Malays - sources that we have discussed in the preceding chapter. A case in point is the Rukunegara. It is difficult to see how the 'guiding principles' as stipulated can contribute to a solution of the nation's political and economic problems, let alone the problem of unity.

As there are many sources of conflict in Malaysia, so there are many facets of the problems of unity. What lies at the root of the tensions seems to be economic competition and jealousies between groups. We have already noted the unequal position between the Malays and Chinese in terms of economic and political power. From our analysis it can also be safely said that neither community is contented with its own position as a result of rising expectations. Yet there is a balance of power between the two groups, in the sense that one has a measure of economic power and another political power. Some amount of co-operation and compromises does exist between the two communities in order

to prevent the whole social system from disintegrating. This situation very much resembles what Rex (1961:127-9) has called a 'truce situation'. Rex (1961:129) has drawn attention to the precarious nature of the truce situation:

Thus for any individual the truce situation continually poses value-conflicts. He must on the one hand co-operate with the other side and on the other he must be prepared to participate in activities which are directed against them. On a psychological level he finds that his attitudes towards them are ambivalent.

Thus, according to Rex, the truce situation could only become the basis of a new social order in 'exceptionally favourable conditions'. Rex does not however specify what these 'exceptionally favourable conditions' are. In so far as Malaysia is concerned, where conflict is more obvious than consensus, it is almost impossible to find such favourable circumstances for the development of a new unitary social order. Social and cultural pluralism is likely to persist for a considerable period of time.

Since economic competition and jealousies are central to the problems in Malaysia, part of the solution must also lie in economic development. What is required, therefore, is an economy that is rapidly expanding, in which there are sufficient opportunities for all members of society. In other words, efforts should be concentrated on enlarging the economic cake (to use a local cliché), so that everyone has

a fair share in it. As Raymond Smith (1962:143) has rightly put it:

It would be ideal if the rapidity of economic development opened up so many opportunities that the jealousies and fears based on race assumed an insignificant role. If this pace of economic development is not initiated and maintained, then the danger of racial conflict is increased.

Apart from rapid economic development, there is also an urgent need for the conflicting groups, the Malays and Chinese, to change their attitudes towards each other and seek compromises. Otherwise the future for Malaysia may not be too encouraging. To quote Rupert Emerson:

The Malays must modify their sense that they are the sole rightful inhabitants of the country as the Chinese must be prepared to share their economic predominance. If the Malays resort to political power to wrest economic control from the Chinese, and the Chinese wield their economic power to extort political concessions from the Malays, then there is good reason to think that disaster lies ahead.

(King, 1957:ix)

In an attempt to solve the racial problems in Malaysia, it may be worthwhile for us to look for solutions in other plural societies. In this connection, the Dutch example is illuminating and may well be pondered in Malaysia (Bagley, 1973 and Rex, 1973b:313-4).

Dutch society is unique because of its deliberate plural organizations. The whole society is divided into four blocs, or verzuiling (pillars) as the Dutch call them. These four blocs or pillars are Catholic, Protestant (which



is divided into two, namely Dutch Reformed and Re-Reformed, both having Calvinist origins) and secular (or Humanist). Each of these blocs has set up its own institutions and organizations encompassing almost every sphere of life. Schools and universities, mass media, trade unions, health and welfare agencies, and even sports associations are organized on a bloc or religious basis. The whole nation, in short, is deeply divided by religious differences (Bagley, 1973:2-4).

Given this extreme segmentation of almost every aspect of Dutch life, one would expect the society to be riven with conflict. But this has not occurred. In fact the opposite is the case. Some degree of consensus exists in the society as a whole and relations between the various blocs have so far been harmonious. This is possible, according to Bagley, because Dutch people adhere to a number of 'deeply institutionalized beliefs and modes of behaviour'. There are, first of all, the maintenance of the existing system with no major attempt at proselytisation between the blocs; secondly, the cultivation of a sense of nationalism, with the monarch, as the symbol of unity; thirdly, elite negotiations on a secret diplomatic basis on matters concerning inter-bloc relations; fourthly, proportional electoral representation; and finally, relative equality of access to wealth, means of production, education, housing, and other social services. These are the main conditions, says Bagley, that tend to minimize conflict between members of different blocs (Bagley, 1973:16-19; Rex, 1973b:313).

In essence, what the Dutch are doing is mutual accommodation among the various blocs. It is this mutual accommodation that resulted in the institutionalisation of separatism between blocs with different interests. Accommodation also serves to maintain a satisfactory equilibrium between the various blocs in the society, by emphasizing the right to a separate cultural existence of different blocs and encouraging elite and diplomatic negotiations on the basis of equality.

What lessons, then, can Malaysia learn from the Dutch example? To begin with, Malaysia may do well in underlying accommodation as the key process in tackling its racial problems. This is by no means to say that accommodation does not exist between the various groups in Malaysia. Rather, given Malaysia's high degree of plurality, the amount of accommodation should be increased so as to cover all spheres of life - political, economic, social, cultural and educational. Furthermore, equality, not inequality, should form the basis of accommodation and relations between groups. This would imply an amendment in the Malaysian Constitution, especially with regards to Article 153 which grants special privileges to the Malays. This is not likely to happen in the near future. For one thing, the Malays could always argue that parity has not been achieved (the purpose of according the Malays special privileges is

to enable them to compete with the more progressive races). For another, a system of preferential treatment has created strong vested interests and it would not be easy to discard it even when the reason for its existence ceases. More importantly, the Conference of Rulers has the power to veto any attempt to abolish the special privileges (Hoang-Thio, 1964:12).

To the extent that Malay special privileges are not abolished, they would remain a major source of irritation between Malays and Chinese. What the policy-makers could do is to accord preferential treatment to all persons in the lower socio-economic strata, irrespective of racial origins. This would not only benefit the bulk of the Malays (since they are in the main poorer), thus achieving the avowed purpose of discriminating in their favour, but also avoid offending the sensitivities of other races. Preferential treatment based on economic rather than racial criteria would also be more equitable since it would benefit those non-Malays who occupy similar socio-economic strata (Hoang-Thio, 1964:12).

The unequal power relationships among the three major ethnic groups would have to be rectified in order to build a stable and just society. This would mean a radical change in the power structure of the country involving, among other things, the reshuffling of the Cabinet to include more non-Malays as Ministers and deputy Ministers, the re-organization of the Malay dominated armed forces, and a new

constituency delimitation to avoid gerrymandering in favour of one particular ethnic group. All these are by no means easy to come by. A change in the power structure based on equality among races would inevitably involve an increase on the part of non-Malays and a decrease on the part of the Malays in terms of power.<sup>13</sup> This may never be acceptable to the Malays. The majority of them still regard themselves as the sole rightful inhabitants of the country and hence they should occupy a predominant position in the administration and government of the country. There are also other Malays who strongly feel that they should retain their political predominance to avoid being 'swamped' by the overwhelming Chinese economic power.

Whatever the attitudes and conceptions of each ethnic group may be towards each other, it is important to realize that the Chinese and Indians are here in Malaysia to stay. They have formed a permanent and important component in the Malaysian plural society. Even with local nationality, these non-Malays may from time to time exhibit their strong sentimental ties to their motherland. But it is a permanent feature that can be lived with. Any forms of oppression or discrimination based on racial criteria are not likely to bring any good to the nation in the long run. Social harmony and integration which are so necessary for a united nation is wanting in Malaysia, as in many other plural societies. This can only be achieved through accommodation between the various groups. Forced assimilation could only lead to chaos.

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13. Power is here regarded as a zero-sum concept: the more one group has, the less is available to the other.

## CHAPTER 8

### TOWARDS A SOCIOLOGY OF MALAYSIA:

#### Some Theoretical Considerations

By using the phrase 'Sociology of Malaysia' it is by no means to imply that Malaysia needs a special brand of sociology. Rather, it is suggested here that Malaysia, because of its plurality and rapid rate of change, challenges much of the conventional theoretical models and calls for a more adequate approach.

Two sets of problems will be dealt with in turn: first, the inadequacy of some Western conventional theoretical models, and second, the plural society theory and its relevance in Malaysia.

#### Inadequacy of Conventional Theoretical Models.

From the outset, it should be noted that most attempts of theoretical constructions in race relations have been based upon black-white relationships in the United States or Britain. These theoretical constructions might be useful in Western societies. However, when applied uncritically to Malaysia or other Southeast Asian nations, they are either unilluminating or completely invalid.

Let us begin with one of the earliest attempts at formulating a race relations theory, namely Robert Park's race relations cycle. According to Park (1950:150), contact between groups is followed by competition, then by accommodation, and eventually by assimilation and amalgamation.

One virtue of Park's scheme is that it was based on the study of interaction and it related its principal categories to features of collective life - an attempt which was particularly notable in his time (Banton, 1967:305). There might be some cases in the history of human societies that approximated Park's scheme. But the scheme has its limited utility when applied to such plural societies as Malaysia. First, like many such cyclical theories, it is simplistic and concerns itself only with the racial situation in a country of immigration and takes little account of the wider institutional and political context within which race relations occur or of the characteristics of the interacting groups (Banton, 1967:76). Secondly, the theory is weak in so far as it points assimilation as an inevitable outcome. After almost two decades of independence, there is still little sign of assimilation in Malaysia. Judging from the reality that Chinese still remain Chinese to all intents and purposes, it is doubtful whether assimilation or amalgamation would ever occur. What is more likely is that cultural and social pluralism may remain Malaysia's destiny for a long time to come.

Another American attempt at a theory of race relations was Warner's theory of colour-caste (Warner, 1936:234-7), which has been mentioned in an earlier chapter. This theory still remains prominent to the present day even though it has been strongly criticised by some sociologists like Oliver Cox.<sup>1</sup> According to Warner, American society is divided into two castes, namely the whites and the Negroes, by a caste barrier. Within each of these colour-castes there are permeable classes. In other words, American society includes both caste and class divisions.

Warner's contention that whites and negroes in the United States are separated by an impermeable 'caste-line', and that this line only tilts but never disappears remains largely true in the United States. His theory has also the virtue of drawing one's attention to the fact that race relations in the United States cannot be fully explained in terms of normal stratification models (Rex, 1970a:15).

Despite its usefulness in America, the model loses its explanatory power when imported to the plural society in Malaysia. In the first place, race relations in Malaysia are essentially yellow-brown relations, in contrast with those between blacks and whites in America. The main difference between yellow-brown relations and black-white

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1. Cox (1959) argues that the Hindu caste system is a unique historical phenomenon and that the term 'caste' should not be used loosely in situations other than India.

relations is that the former is based more on cultural distinctions while the latter on physical differences.

In the second place, there has never been any so-called 'caste-line' that separates the Malays and Chinese in Malaysia.<sup>2</sup> A third difference is that whereas the negroes in America are a numerical minority accounting for only ten per cent of the total population, in Malaysia the Chinese are a significant minority, accounting for more than one-third of the total population. This numerical strength, together with their relatively powerful economic position, makes the position of the Chinese unique and completely different from that of the American negroes.

Another approach which is popular among students or scholars of race relations derives from the Marxist or class perspective. The Negro sociologist, Oliver Cox (1959), for instance, looks at the American race relations in terms of this perspective. In objecting Warner's theory of colour-caste, Cox argued that race relations in America were essentially those of political class relations, where Negroes as an under-class were to a degree especially exploited within a capitalist system of social relations of production.

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2. It could however be argued that some form of 'caste-like' divisions existed between the white rulers and the colonized people during the colonial period.



This type of Marxist approach has also been applied to analyse the problem of communalism in Malaysia. Rahman Embong, a young Marxist sociologist, has remarked that 'class relations are the basic relations, and communal relations, essentially, are subordinated to class relations', and that '(communalism) is being used as an ideology as well as a strategy of action by the ruling classes to keep the masses divided and to maintain the present neo-colonial system intact' (Rahman Embong, 1974:66 & 68). This position is essentially similar to that of the vulgar Marxists, who, in the modern Western context, would look upon racism as a device by the capitalist class to divide the working class into antagonistic segments for better control.

There is certainly some truth in the Marxist assertion, especially its emphasis on the importance of the economic variable. However, just as the theory cannot convincingly account for the divisions between white and negro workers in the United States, Britain and South Africa, so it also fails to explain the antagonism between Chinese and Malay workers satisfactorily. Nor can the theory account for the identification of race with economic functions in Malaysia.

It is also questionable that class conflict has always been the determining factor in race relations, as some Marxists have asserted. Class conflict may feature more prominently than racial differences in certain race relations situations. Yet this is certainly not true in the case of

Malaysia. Malaysia is not a class society in the true Marxist sense. It is still at an early stage of industrial development and class consciousness and class antagonisms are conspicuously lacking. Everywhere, racial bonds seem to be stronger than class affiliations.

Like most other plural societies, racial conflict in Malaysia is more akin to rebellion than revolution. This means that the object of the conflict is not so much to change the system of domination in the Marxist sense of revolution but to reverse the relationship of domination between the conflicting groups. As Lockwood (1970:64) has put it:

By contrast with class revolution conflict in plural society, however violent, is not first and foremost directed at an alteration in the structure of power and deference but rather at the usurpation of power and deference by one section of the community to the disadvantage of the other.

It is for this reason, added Lockwood (1970:64-65) that

revolutionary goals are unlikely to emerge from the antagonisms of groups in plural societies unless ethnic and racial divisions happen to coincide with lines of economic and other power relationships. Yet when this coincidence obtains, it by no means always follows that the equation of race or ethnicity with class position leads to forms of conflict in which the latter element predominates over the former. And where this coincidence is lacking, the racial or ethnic identification usually overrides the consciousness of a class position.

This situation is largely true in Malaysia. The consciousness of the conflict between groups is in terms of ethnicity rather than class, and the object of the struggle and communal bargaining is not so much to change the system of domination as such, but rather to alter the relationship of domination, namely which group should get what, and how much. In the National Front Government for example, the central question is 'which component party should get how many seats'. In economy, the emphasis is to redistribute the national wealth more equitably between the groups. In educational opportunities, there is the imposition of quotas based on ethnicity. Clearly ethnicity plays a far more important role than other criteria.

Under such circumstances, the more intense the conflict between the Malays and Chinese becomes, the more likely that solidarity of each ethnic group will become focused on the symbol and consciousness of ethnicity. To the extent that this is so, the weaker will be class consciousness between ethnic groups, and class distinctions within each group.

Furthermore, events of recent years have shown that non-economic factors such as the educational policy (particularly with regards to the language issue) can cause as much cleavages between Malays and Chinese as the differential relationships to the means of production in Western societies, and which cannot be fully dealt with in Marxist terms.<sup>3</sup>

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3. See, for example M. Roff (1967:316-328) and Haas (1967).

It remains now for us to consider the usefulness of normal stratification models, more specifically functionalism. The functionalist approach has been much debated in sociology and it is not our intention here to enter these debates. What we are concerned here is to examine its relevance in plural societies particularly in Malaysia.

In its more recent and sophisticated form, functionalism has postulated among other things that societies consist of inter-related parts and that causation is multiple and reciprocal; hence societies must be looked at holistically (van den Berghe, 1967b:295). These postulates seem to be reasonably useful in drawing our attention to the inter-relations and inter-dependence of the various parts that make up a society. Nevertheless, most functionalists have tended to overstress inter-relationships between parts, and conversely, to underrate the degree of 'compartmentalization' that is possible in a society (van den Berghe, 1967b:302).

One needs only to look closely at some plural societies to realize that different elements or parts of a society can co-exist without being significantly complementary and interdependent. In Indonesia, for instance, Boeke (1953) has observed the existence of a dual economy, namely, the co-existence of a capitalist and a pre-capitalist economy, side by side, and yet separately. In Malaysia, we have earlier observed the functioning of different types of schools - Malay, Chinese, English and Tamil - side by side and yet

independently of each other. These examples show that social systems do not necessarily consist of complementary and functionally related parts as the functionalists have claimed. On the contrary, social systems can, and do, as in the case of many plural societies, consist of non-complementary, functionally unrelated and structurally discrete segments.

A very important assumption of the functionalist approach is value consensus as a pre-requisite to the existence of a social system (as Parsons (1967:5, 471-5) asserts). This position has been criticised to be untenable (van den Berghe, 1967b:296). Malaysia, like many other plural societies, is characterized by heterogeneity, dissensus and conflict. Each ethnic group has its own language, religion, and its own customs and ways of life. There is a lack of what Furnivall (1948:306) called 'social will'. Furthermore, members of the various ethnic groups share no common system of values. Yet, despite the conspicuous lack of value consensus, the society has so far managed to hang together.

This raises the fundamental question of the relationship between consensus and integration. Consensus may be an important and sufficient basis of social integration. But it is by no means a necessary condition. In the absence of a value consensus, as in Malaysia, there are other alternative bases of social integration. As we have seen in the previous

chapter, one such basis is political coercion or domination by a cultural segment. But we have also indicated the instability of political domination as a basis of integration. Hence we suggested also the institutions of the economy or the social relations of production as another basis. We wish to add that when these two bases are combined, they are likely to be quite effective as alternatives to consensus.

The case of South Africa offers a good illustration. The dominant white minority not only monopolizes the political apparatus, but also controls key economic resources. The net effect is that the non-whites are rendered politically impotent and economically dependent on the whites, so that, in the words of van der Berghe (1967a:139), 'tyranny is difficult to overthrow'.

The relative lack of a common value system in plural societies clearly indicates the inadequacy of the functionalist approach or stratification theory. But this is not to say that it has no validity in other situations. At least in the case of Malaysia, the notion of a stratification system is useful in analysing each constituent segment of the society, such as we have done for the Chinese community.

The above remarks suffice to indicate the failure of the various attempts to reduce race relations theory to the position of being a particular case of stratification theory. Race is not simply a special case of stratification as

claimed by sociologists like van den Berghe (1967a:21-25) or Runciman (1972:497-509). This view is taken by British sociologists such as Rex (1970a and 1970b:35-55) and Lockwood (1970:57-72) who have argued that race relations present a distinctive type of sociological problem which cannot be wholly dealt with in class and stratification terms. As Rex (1970b:37) has correctly put it, there are aspects of race relations situations such as ascriptive role allocations and stereotyping according to observable characteristics which are not satisfactorily explained even by a flexible use of stratification theory. And in Malaysia, the salience of ethnicity and the strong ethnocentrism that exists within each ethnic group do seem to add some new dimensions to race relations situations.

#### The Plural Society Theory

Let us now turn to the second major problem of this chapter, namely, the theory of the plural society. The plural society concept was first formulated by J.S. Furnivall (1939 & 1948) on the basis of his research in Burma and Indonesia. The concept referred to societies (particularly those in the tropical region under colonial domination) with sharp cleavages between different population groups brought together within the same political unit. In the passage quoted earlier (see above, p.30), the plural society according to Furnivall consists of a medley of peoples with diverse cultures and that there is little contact between the various

groups except in buying and selling. Furnivall further notes that in all societies conflict occurs along economic boundaries but in a plural society racial and ethnic differences coincide with these divisions, so that tension and instability are more likely to take place. As Furnivall (1948:311) himself put it:

Everywhere, in all forms of society, the working of economic forces makes for tension between groups with competing or conflicting interests; between town and country, industry and agriculture, capital and labour. In a homogeneous society the tension is alleviated by their common citizenship, but in a plural society there is a corresponding cleavage along racial lines. The foreign elements live in the towns, the native in rural areas; commerce and industry are in foreign hands and the natives are mainly occupied in agriculture; foreign capital employs native labour or imported coolies.

Before we go on to examine the relevance of Furnivall's theory, it should be noted that however disjunctive between the various groups may be in the plural society, there are nevertheless three types of relationships that bind the society together. Furnivall speaks of 'religion, culture and language, ideas and ways' of the various groups, and this apparently refers to normative ties. He also refers to the 'same political unit' thus recognizing coercive ties. Finally he speaks of individuals meeting 'in the market place, in buying and selling' and 'a division of labour along racial lines'. This is an apparent recognition of utilitarian and economic bonds (Rex, 1970a:20).



As a model deriving from research on two major southeast Asian societies, it would seem that Furnivall's theory is more appropriate than some of the models we have examined earlier for the analysis of race relations in Malaysia. Since Furnivall wrote, the concept of the plural society has been widely used to refer to the Malaysian society.<sup>4</sup> More importantly, the dominant features of Furnivall's plural society which include cultural heterogeneity, residential separation, occupational specialization by race, lack of social contact and one politically dominant group are all exhibited by Malaysia (Rabushka, 1973:14-15, 19-27). That Malaysia consists of various ethnic groups with diverse cultures under the same political unit fits particularly well Furnivall's description.

Furnivall's theory, however, is by no means without flaws. In the first place, the notion of the plural society, as pointed out by Morris (1957:125), tempts us to focus our attention on cultural and racial appearances and in so doing overlook the underlying structural uniformities. Malaysia has exhibited important cultural and racial divisions through most of its modern history, but these divisions had not created cleavages running the length and breadth of the country. The different ideals and aspirations of the various ethnic groups may be more disintegrative than integrative;

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4. See, for example, Freedman (1960:158-168), Tregonning (1962:420-428), Rabushka (1973), Ratnam (1961:1-10).

but there has not been a framework for a complete alignment of ethnic forces. There are other non-ethnic cleavages in the society (Freedman, 1960:168).

Related to the above is the fact that the use of the term 'plural' focuses attention on the diversities apparent in racially or ethnically mixed societies thus ignoring the varied and numerous bonds which link members of different sections either individually or as groups. At the same time the theory seems to exaggerate the unity of these sections and fails to take into account their internal divisions (Morris, 1957:125; Smith, 1969b:421).

The plural society theory has been widely discussed and analysed since Furnivall's work was published. The most extensive analysis, however, is that of M.G. Smith.<sup>5</sup> In the tradition of Furnivall, Smith too sees plural societies as characterized by cultural diversity, social cleavage and political domination by a cultural segment.

For Smith, institutions play a very significant role in a social structure. It is the institutions which determine what category a society belongs. Thus a society whose members all share a single set of institutions is culturally and socially homogeneous. A society having one basic

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5. Cf. Smith (1965). Other scholars who have analysed the concept include: Rex (1959:114-124), Lockwood (1970), van den Berghe (1967a). See also Race, vol.12, no.4, 1971 and Kuper and Smith, (eds.) (1969).

institutional system and a number of institutional alternatives and specialities is culturally and socially heterogeneous. A plural society is one in which there is a formal diversity in the basic system of compulsory institutions (such as kinship, education, religion, property and economy) (Smith, 1965:82 & 88). A further defining characteristic which Smith insists is that in a plural society the political domination is exercised by a culturally distinct numerical minority. Obviously this definition would include nearly all colonial societies but, interestingly, it would exclude some newly-independent post-colonial societies.

Comparing the approaches of Furnivall and Smith, there seems to be a basic agreement on the political form of the plural society, namely, domination by a cultural minority. Furthermore, both Furnivall and Smith emphasize cultural diversity and social cleavage as characteristics of the plural society. For Furnivall, both political domination by a cultural minority and cultural diversity are matters of historical fact resulting from Western colonialism. Smith, however, organizes these characteristics within a different theoretical framework. He regards them as the necessary and sufficient conditions of pluralism (Kuper, 1969:13).

Main differences between the two models are: first, in the type of societies conceived as plural. Furnivall is mainly concerned with colonial societies in the tropics under the impact of western capitalism. Smith includes societies

other than plural ones, such as those originating from conquest, migration and other forces. Second, there is also a difference in their approach to causal factors. Furnivall emphasizes the role of colonialism and capitalism in the formation of the plural society and cultural diversity is the context within which the primacy of economic forces leads to the disintegration of the common will and the transformation of groups into mass aggregates. Smith, however, attributes causal significance to cultural incompatibility or wide cultural differences (Kuper, 1969:14).

A major difficulty in Smith's formulations, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, is the problem of why colonial societies do not break up after independence. Smith has insisted on the importance of political domination as the binding factor and argued that the withdrawal of the colonial power from colonial territories would eventually threaten the latter's existence. This may be what happens in some cases, but what Smith overlooks is the fact that there are also other non-political institutions that contribute to the maintenance of the society.

Smith has been accused of leaning too heavily on simple cultural anthropology and of not making any careful study of the relations of the market place which occupied a central place in Furnivall's work. Neither does he consider what Malinowski (1945) refers to as the 'third column' institutions which arise within the process of culture contact.

Smith's formulations, like many other plural society theories, also suffer the danger of being oversimple. As Malcolm Cross has pointed out, the plural society theory describes a society 'in terms of essentially one category or sets of categories', namely, those related to 'cultural variation expressed in terms of institutional difference and ethnic difference'. There is no doubt that ethnic or racial divisions are of great importance in plural societies, but they are not the only divisions in the formation of groups. There are, for instance, class distinctions, divisions between those who wield political power and those who do not, and between those who occupy prestigious positions and those who do not. All of these non-ethnic divisions are seldom taken into consideration by the plural society theorists (Cross, 1971:484).

Another scholar whose idea on the plural society deserves a brief discussion here is van den Berghe. For van den Berghe (1967a:34) societies are plural insofar as 'they are segmented into corporate groups that frequently, although not necessarily, have different cultures or subcultures and insofar as their social structure is compartmentalized into analogous, parallel, non-complementary, but distinguishable sets of institutions. The two defining characteristics of pluralism are therefore cleavage between corporate groups and institutional duplication. It is these two criteria, according to van den Berghe, that distinguish plural societies from other types of societies, including those characterized by Durkheim's mechanical and organic solidarity.

van den Berghe (1967a:35) outlines some additional characteristics of pluralism such as a lack of value consensus, cultural heterogeneity, presence of conflict, relative autonomy between the different segments of the society, importance of political coercion and economic interdependence as alternative bases of social integration and political domination by one corporate group.

For van den Berghe (1969:68) pluralism should be regarded as a variable. As he explains:

I prefer to regard pluralism as a variable, and to include cases of stratification based on 'race', caste, estate, or class as instances of pluralism, even though the constituent groups share the same general culture.

Clearly, van den Berghe's usage of the concept of pluralism is more general and inclusive than, but broadly congruent with, that of Smith.

Pluralism, says van den Berghe, should also be regarded as a question of degree. Thus, some societies, like South Africa, which consists of four major racial castes with diverse cultural traditions are more pluralistic than such societies as the United States which comprise only two major races sharing more or less the same European culture.

van den Berghe (1967a:136-144) also suggests that the analysis of plural societies should be tackled at four main levels - groups, institutions, values and individuals.

These four levels of analysis would bring out the main dimensions of pluralism in a society. But this approach has its virtue beyond the confines of plural societies. It can also be applied fruitfully to other non-plural societies, since all societies consist of groups, institutions, values and individuals.

van den Berghe has performed a good service in attempting to draw up a scheme in regards to the major dimensions of pluralism at the four levels of analysis (van den Berghe, 1967a:142-3). But he is quick to point out that the attempt to determine how pluralistic a society is is not an end in itself. He himself recognizes the implicit suggestion in the scheme that pluralism should always be regarded as a set of independent variables that help us to understand the various fundamental sociological questions such as the origin of group conflict, bases of social integration, the distribution and exercise of political power, and the dynamics of culture change and assimilation. He is confident that

the analysis of pluralism is a somewhat new vantage point from which to approach the comparative study of whole societies and more specifically a conceptual framework for the understanding of complex, heterogeneous societies.

(van den Berghe, 1967a:141)

Despite the various criticisms and objections, the plural society theory has its inestimable merit. This is that it is one of the few attempts to explicitly incorporate

racial and ethnic divisions within an overall conceptual framework. It is a conflict theory in that it attempts to account for dissensus and divisions between ethnic groups in plural colonial societies which cannot be fully accounted for in terms of the conventional sociological concepts and categories.

The importance of the theory of the plural society has been aptly summed up by Rex (1959:124):

The study of plural societies is important for sociology generally because the explicit recognition that they are plural draws attention to the fact that social systems do exist in which conflict is more obvious than consensus. The model of the plural society, when its workings are more fully understood, is one which is just as essential to the sociologist as is, say, Parsons' model of an integrated social system.

Clearly, as a conceptual framework, the plural society theory has its usefulness in the race relations situation in Malaysia - a situation no longer explicable in terms of the functionalist approach which has stressed so much on consensus, harmony, stability and integration. Malaysian society is characterized by conflict, coercion, change and instability. Hence, only a conflict model of society can best explain the society in general and race relations in particular.

This brings us to the problem of a suitable analytical framework in terms of which the Malaysian plural society can be fruitfully analysed. Once again, van den Berghe's framework is highly relevant. Race relations, van den Berghe



(1967a:148-9) maintains, must be studied historically, holistically and cross-culturally. Lack of a historical perspective is a major problem in the study of race relations in Malaysia. This is by no means to imply that race relations scholars are unaware of basic historical facts - far from it. Morrison, Carnell, Burridge, Silcock, Ratnam and Rabushka,<sup>6</sup> to mention just a few, were all aware of Malaysian history in their writings. Rather, they have failed to discuss the 'evolutionary dynamics' of Malaysian race relations through reasons known only to themselves. None of them, for example, had analysed British colonial domination and its implications for race relations. Every racial situation has a history. Thus, to emphasize the historical dimension of race relations would enable us to understand the present situation better. Furthermore, since racial conflict is closely related to colonialism, there is also an urgent need to examine colonialism in great detail, along lines suggested by Rex (1970a), for instance, before we try to understand race relations problems in Malaysia.

To study race relations holistically is to study it macro-sociologically, that is, in the context of the total society in which race relations take place. To put it another way, race relations should be related to the wider

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6. Cf. Morrison (1949:239-253), Carnell (1953:99-117), Burridge (1957:151-168), Silcock (1965:177-199), Ratnam (1965) and Rabushka (1973).

social structure. As van den Berghe (1970:16) explains:

To understand the structure of a plural society, the first steps in the analysis are to map out the lines of cleavage between the groups, to specify the institutional areas that are shared between these groups and those that are not, to establish the form and content of relationships between members of these groups, and to define in which ways these intergroup relations differ from relations within the groups. This procedure is equivalent to study the entire society.

This plea for a holistic approach in no way implies the worthlessness of narrow specific studies. Narrowly focused specific studies are perfectly legitimate. What it does mean, however, is that in order to gain a correct interpretation of a situation, one should relate it to the wider social context. To understand the Chinese community in Malaysia, for instance, one should know the structure of the Malaysian plural society, including of course the social relations of production and power relations.

It is also important that we must approach race relations from a comparative, cross-cultural perspective. At present, there is a general dearth of sociological studies of race relations in Malaysia, more particularly cross-cultural studies.<sup>7</sup> There is, for instance, almost a complete absence

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7. However, some sociological studies of race relations that are worth mentioning include: Charles Hirschman (1972), Raymond Lee (1975), Sanusi Osman (1972) and Rabushka (1973).

of comparative, cross-cultural sociological studies of Overseas Chinese minorities in Southeast Asia. Much of the literature on race relations today seems to have concentrated on Western industrial societies and has been written by scholars who lack comparative experience (van den Berghe, 1967a:4-5). A comparative, cross-cultural approach is essential in that it enables us to make broad generalizations which is a necessary step towards the attempt to construct a general theory of race relations.

From the theoretical contributions to the study of the plural society we have discussed above and bearing in mind the importance of a historico-comparative-macrosociological approach, it is possible for us to outline some broad generalizations to serve as the basis for our analytical framework.

First, plural societies emerge largely as a result of colonialism. Among the main features of such societies are political and economic coercion. It is political coercion as well as economic interdependence that hold the plural society together. Our first task in the study of any plural society is therefore to examine the various aspects of colonialism, including its basic political and economic institutions. This involves not only a historical but also a macro-sociological perspective.

Second, all plural societies involve some form of stratification, using the term as Rex suggests in a wider sense to include all kinds of differentiation and conflict. Our next task is to look at the stratification and structure

of plural societies - not merely at the point of production, but also in the society as a whole.

Third, at least five major groups can be found in plural societies. These are classes, political groups, deference groups, racial groups and ethnic groups (Cross, 1971:487). An adequate analysis of race relations should include a detailed examination of these group divisions, such as the degree of superimposition that any group may possess, and the degree of disjunction between groups.

This leads us to the fourth point which has been made by van den Berghe, namely, in addition to corporate groups, there are three other levels of pluralism: institutions, values and individuals. These four levels are interrelated; but to separate them analytically would enable us to see the dimensions of pluralism more clearly and systematically.

Fifth and finally, plural situations are characterized by a relative prominence of conflict and a conspicuous absence of consensus. This point has been stressed by almost all the scholars of race relations and plural societies. In view of this, a conflict model is more likely to bring about a fruitful analysis than a consensus model.

We are not suggesting, of course, that this framework is the only one available in terms of which plural societies might be analysed. Nevertheless, it represents an attempt to combine some of the useful insights of scholars who have

had direct experience with plural societies. The framework, if strictly adhered to, would enable us to acquire a fuller picture of the complexities of plural societies.

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